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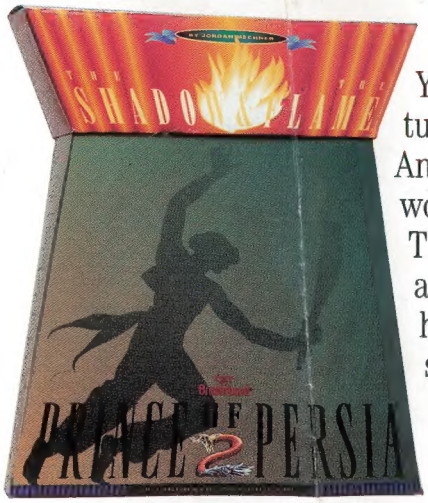

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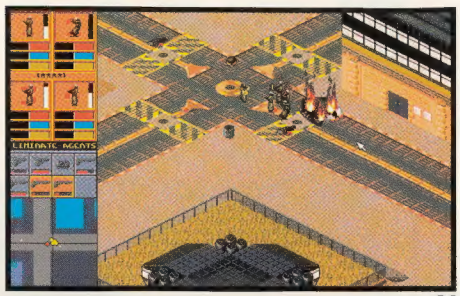
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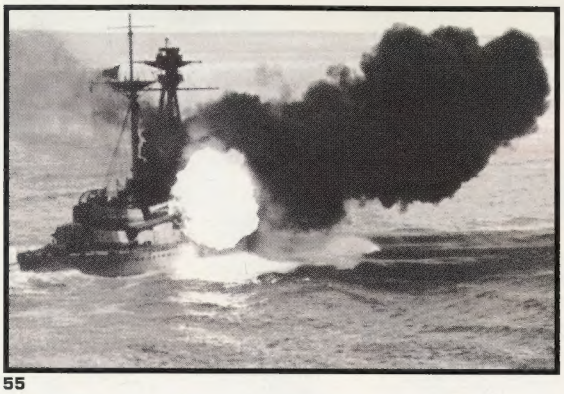
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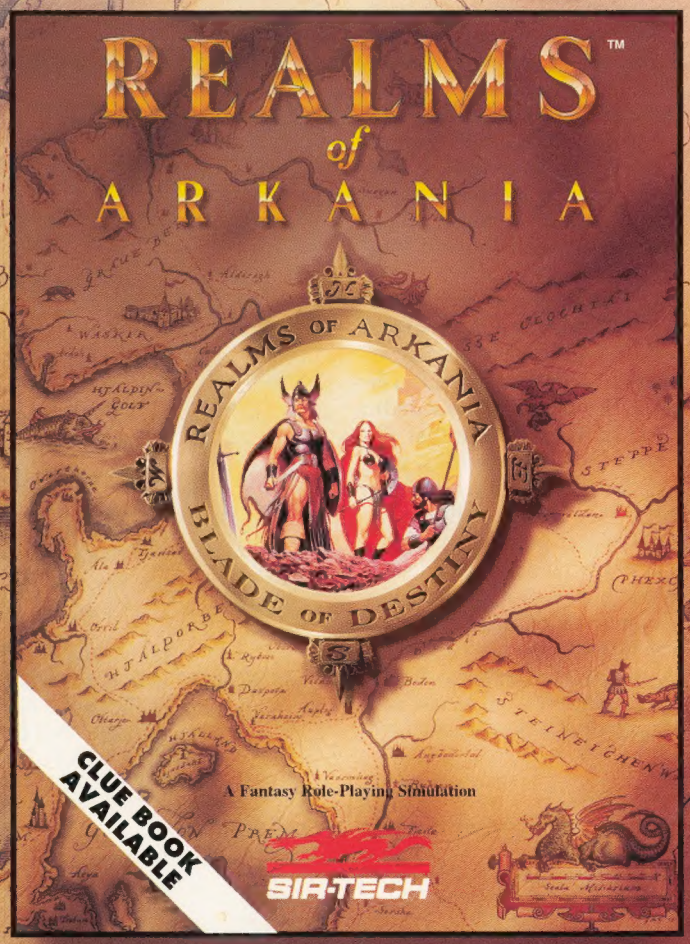

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EDITOR'S NOTES

As you flip through this issue, you're going to notice a lot of changes — many of them suggested by you. First, we've brought back the hardware requirements that used to accompany each review, but with a twist. There's often a big difference between the minimum system a game will run on and the minimum system needed to experience the game the way the designers intended, and that's why we now include *our* recommended requirements. We load each game on everything from a 286/12 to our hot rod 486/66 with 16 megs of RAM, all so we can tell you what you'll *really* need to run a game.

You'll also want to check out our improved GameBytes section. Working closely with our art department, we've managed to cram as much info as possible into these half-page reviews. And we've added ratings to the GameBytes, so that you can tell at a glance what the writer thought of the game.

Something else you'll notice is that the Update section of PC News (now called Mega Bytes) has become our newest column, Extended Play. This is the place to go to find out the scoop on enhanced versions of existing games, as well as the latest word in add-ons for current programs — construction kits, scenario disks, and bug patches.

This issue also marks the arrival of Matthew A. Firme as Senior Editor. Matt is just as much a game-playing enthusiast as myself, and he's dedicated to making sure that *PC Entertainment* provides you with the sort of info you need to stay on top of the rapidly evolving world of gaming software.

Drop us a line and let us know what you think about the changes, or tell us what else you'd like to see covered in the magazine. We can't answer every single letter, but as you can tell from this issue, we read them all.

Stephen Poole
Editor

OOPS!

We work long and hard to make sure we get our facts straight, but a couple of errors made it into the last two issues. In our May/June issue, we listed the number for information on R.A.W. Entertainment's products as 800-323-7878, when in fact that's the number to place orders via credit card. The number for info is 713-286-2386. And in our July/August issue, we referred to the latest game from Realism Entertainment as *Kingdoms of England II*, *Vikings: Fields of Glory*. Though usually known by the much shorter *Vikings*, the full correct title is *Vikings: Fields of Conquest*. We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused R.A.W., Realism, or our readers.

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.95 MACH, NINETY FEET ABOVE THE GROUND, BOTH SIDES TRYING TO SHOOT HIM DOWN. WOUNDED IN THE ARM, KAPITAN ALEXANDER ZUYEV GUIDED HIS MiG-29 TO FREEDOM LEFT-HANDED. COULD YOU?

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On May 20, 1989 MiG-29 pilot Alexander Zuyev began a desperate plan to steal the Soviet Union's most advanced combat aircraft and fly it to political asylum.

The pilot who wrote the book on the MiG-29, Alexander Zuyev, tells his harrowing story (including authentic Soviet dogfighting tactics) in Fulcrum *from Warner Books.*

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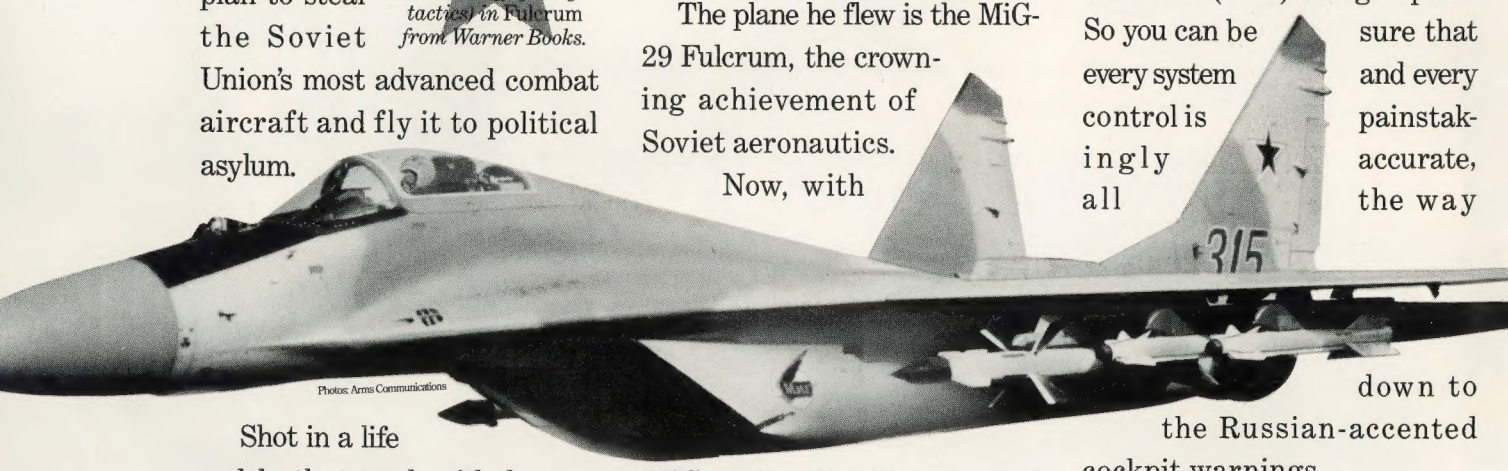

Photos: Arms Communications

NOTHING WAS LOST IN THE TRANSLATION

The flight model was patterned after actual Mikoyan-Gurevich (MiG) design specs. So you can be sure that every system and every control is painstakingly accurate, all the way down to the Russian-accented cockpit warnings.

IT'LL TEST YOUR SKILL AND YOUR PATRIOTISM

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computer never limits your control inputs, whether inspired or foolish. Its twin Isotov RD-33 engines produce 36,600 lbs. of thrust, to the F-16's 25,000. And superb aerodynamics make it controllable at low speeds and high angles of attack that would have enemy pilots fighting to avoid a spin.

The most fearsome opponent is a human one. With EBS, up to six players can go head-to-head.

SPECTRUM HOLOBYTE HEAD 2 HEAD

THEY WON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT HIT THEM

Your MiG's IRST (Infrared Search and Track) system can track an F-16 without revealing your presence on his threat display. So you can get on his six o'clock before he even knows you're there. Once in range, you'll be able to lock on to the Falcon just by turning to look at him with the MiG-29's helmet mounted sight. Then call "pusk" (launch) as you fire missiles or "ogon" (firing) as you ventilate him with your computer-accurate 30mm gun. Either way, his plane will make a satisfying crunch when it hits the ground.

Next time you have an F-16 glued to your tail, try the MiG-29's "Cobra" maneuver.

1) You pull up past a 90 alpha climb.

2) Your airspeed drops rapidly; the F-16 zooms past.

3) You abruptly pitch the nose back to level flight. Now you're on his six, with a little score to settle.

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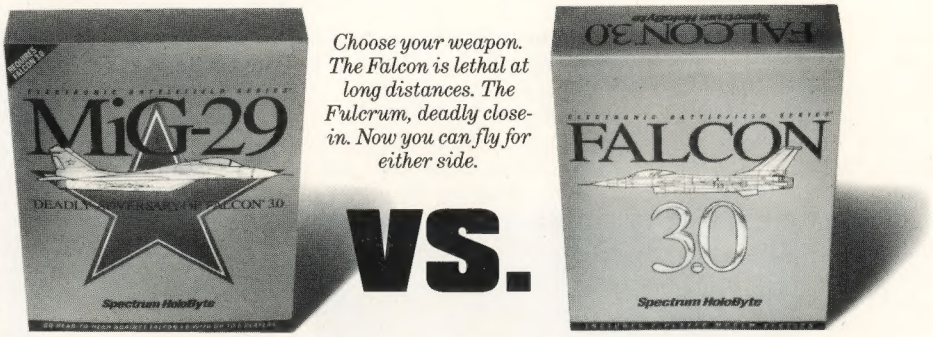
Anything more realistic wouldn't be a simulation.

INTRODUCING MiG-29



Choose your weapon. The Falcon is lethal at long distances. The Fulcrum, deadly close-in. Now you can fly for either side.

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MiG-29 *add-on requires* Falcon® 3.0. *Available on IBM compatibles.*

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INDUSTRY NEWS

Two major names in entertainment software, **MicroProse** and **Spectrum HoloByte**, have announced a merger of impressive proportions. Following a $10 million investment in MicroProse by Spectrum HoloByte, the two companies will join forces, with Spectrum acquiring approximately 60% of MicroProse stock. The new company formed by the merger is expected to retain the MicroProse name, as MicroProse was already a publicly traded company.

Sony Electronic Publishing has purchased **Psygnosis**, publishers of the popular *Lemmings*. Psygnosis, with offices in England, France, and Germany, will help drive Sony's European expansion efforts. Additionally, the company will continue to publish and market games under the Psygnosis brand, as well as develop software for Sony's Imagesoft division.

Sanctuary Woods acquired **Mind F/X**, a Toronto developer known for its educational CD-ROM titles. Mind F/X will contribute their expertise to Sanctuary Woods' new "I-learn" series of educational CD-ROMs.

ICOM Simulations, known for its groundbreaking *Sherlock Holmes, Consulting Detective* series of CD-ROM products, has been purchased by **Viacom International**. Viacom is an entertainment conglomerate, which owns MTV, The Movie Channel, and scores of syndicated TV programs.

Under its Affiliated Label Program, **Electronic Arts** has entered into five new distribution agreements. E.A. will distribute CD-ROMs for **Aris Multimedia Entertainment**, **Mindplay**, **Morgan Interactive**, **Multicom Publishing**, and **Twin Dolphin Games**. E.A. has also established a new development agreement with **Strategic Visions**. Formerly associated with **Interplay Productions**, Strategic Visions will develop edutainment software for both PC CD-ROM and the new 3DO platform.

In other distribution news, **Gametek** has reached an agreement to distribute products for **Spirit of Discovery**. Gametek, best known for bringing *Jeopardy!* and *Wheel of Fortune* to home entertainment platforms, will distribute six software titles for Spirit of Discovery: *Batman Returns*, *Draft & Print*, *Facts in Action*, *Body Illustrated*, *Beat the House*, and *NFL Video Pro*. Gametek is also distributing PC games for **Konami**.

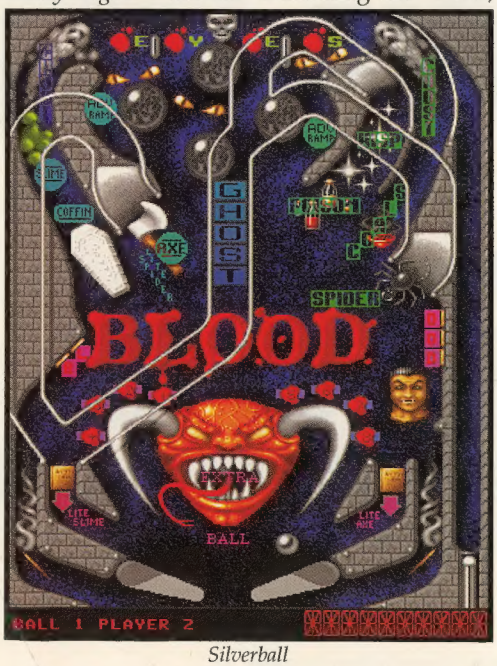
Maxis is entering into its first affiliate relationship, with **ScreenMagic, Inc.** Maxis, publisher of *SimCity*, will market ScreenMagic's first entertainment title. No information about the title is yet available.

Educational developer **Earthquest, Inc.** will now be known as **Learning Magic, Inc.** The company will stay the course it charted as Earthquest—namely producing software that enriches the learning process through multimedia.

NEW AND UPCOMING RELEASES

Two household names — **Sony** and **ESPN** — are joining forces to create a series of multi-platform sports games. Sony Electronic Publishing's *ESPN Baseball Tonight* and *ESPN Sunday Night NFL* will debut in December, featuring ESPN personalities and studio sets. Sony's Multimedia Productions will produce the PC versions of the games, while Sony Imagesoft will develop the Nintendo and Sega releases. More Sony/ESPN titles are expected next year. (Sony Electronic Publishing Company, 9 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019. (212) 418-9439.)

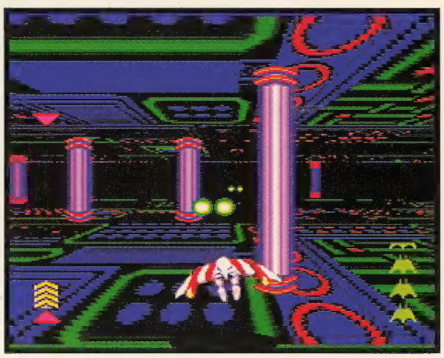
In another development partnership, **MicroLeague Interactive** and **Epic MegaGames** have collaborated to produce two new entries — *Silverball* and *Brix*. *Silverball* is actually four different pinball games rolled into one. *Brix* sounds something like *Tetris*, until you mention its laser cannons, boiling lava, and elevators. (MicroLeague Interactive Software, 2201 Drummond Plaza, Newark, DE 19711-5711. (302) 368-9990.)



Silverball

Sanctuary Woods has acquired the rights to produce software based on this summer's *Once Upon A Forest*, an animated feature-length film. The film centers on woodland creatures and the struggle to preserve their environment. Slated for CD-ROM release on PC, 3DO, and Macintosh platforms, *Once Upon A Forest* should be available in the first half of 1994. (Sanctuary Woods, 1006 Government Street, Victoria, BC, Canada V8W 1X7. (800) 665-2544.)

British developer **Storm** is currently adapting the film *The Lawnmower Man* for PC and Mac CD-ROM. Players can expect to see some of the same 3-D modelling used in the film, as well as original movie footage. *The Lawnmower Man* will hit the market in early 1994. (Storm, The Lombard Business Centre, 50 Lombard Road, London SW11 3SU. 011-44-71-585-3308.)


The Lawnmower Man (SNES version)

Swfte is readying three new Windows games. *Gettysburg* recreates the Civil War showdown with a plethora of historically accurate background information. If a nice game of cards is more your speed, *The Bicycle Limited Edition Collection* combines PC versions of Solitaire, Poker, Cribbage, and Bridge in one package. There are over 50 variations of Solitaire, and Bicycle Poker lets you choose your op-

FOR THE AMIGA AND IBM PC

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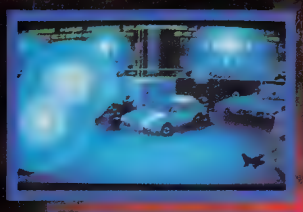

Screen shots shown are from an Amiga version of the game.

OCP is sending in Rehab Officers to clear the streets of Old Detroit, making way for the construction of Delta City. When ROBOCOP sees helpless families forced out of their homes as the bulldozers move in, he joins the resistance movement to battle the Rehabs!

Armed with a new multi-weapon arm attachment containing a large-bore cannon and a smart bomb, plus a gyropack for airborne assault capability, ROBOCOP faces a batallion of ED-209's, tanks, heavy artillery and a new adversary, OTOMO. The odds seem impossible, but remember—you're ROBOCOP!

Ocean of America, Inc.
1855 O'Toole Ave.
Suite D-102
San Jose, CA 95131

ORION PICTURES CORPORATION

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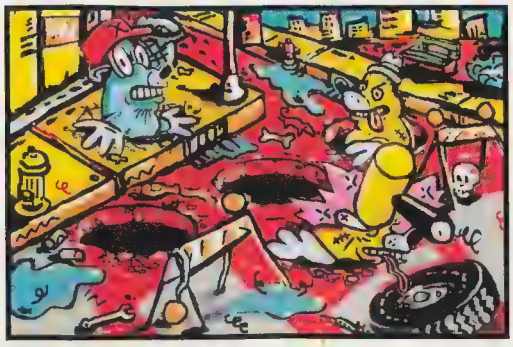
The name of the game

ocean

Product Information Number 100



Whack-A-Mole

ponents from an eight-character cast. Swfte is also bringing *Whac-A-Mole* home from the arcade. (Swfte International Ltd., Stone Mill Office Park, 724 Yorklyn Road, Hockessin, DE 19707-8701. (302) 234-1740.)

CrossWire! from **SilverSun** is billed as the Knowledge Connection Game. It covers trivia from the realms of pop culture, history, science, sports, and geography. Players match up jumbled pairs of clues from different columns. (SilverSun Inc., 100 Jersey Ave., New Brunswick, NJ 08901. (908) 745-9095.)

If you'd like to learn music, **Ibis Software** has produced a software program that teaches its users how to read music and play musical instruments. *Soloist* also lets you interact with the computer through a microphone and compatible sound card (not included). (Ibis Software, 140 Second Street, Suite 603, San Francisco, CA 94105. (415) 546-1917.)

Kids ages 3-8 can get their musical start with **Dr. T's** *Sing-A-Long*, which mixes 27 classic children's songs with on-screen animations illustrating the songs' content. The program features a child-friendly interface with oversized buttons. (Dr. T's Music Software, 124 Crescent Road, Needham, MA 02194. (617) 455-1454.)

Doll houses have been a favorite with kids for as long as anyone can remember. Now **Davidson & Associates** is presenting *Kid CAD*, the first Windows-based 3-D building kit. Children can use *Kid CAD* to design houses, castles, and other structures. Once junior architects create the building they can add furnishings and animated characters. *Kid CAD* sells for $49.95. (Davidson & Associates, Inc., PO Box 2961, Torrance, CA 90509. (800) 545-7677.)

Goldilocks & The Three Bears

Syracuse Language Systems' multimedia CD-ROM *Goldilocks & The Three Bears* tutors users in Spanish, French, or German, as it leads them through this classic story. (Syracuse Language Systems, 719 East Genesee Street, Syracuse NY 13210.)

The Playroom has been updated by **Broderbund**. The DOS version is built around seven activities covering language usage, beginning math, and general learning exercises. The program works with Windows and features VGA graphics (it formerly had EGA graphics). (Broderbund Software, 500 Redwood Blvd., P.O. Box 6121, Novato, CA 94948-6121.)

NEW GAMING PERIPHERALS AND UTILITIES

Advanced Digital Systems is bundling its Game Blaster video converter with three PC games. The converter, which lets you output PC video to your television set, retails for $169. The new bundle will include **Velocity's** *Jet Fighter II* and *Spectre Challenger*, and **Broderbund's** *Prince of Persia*. (Advanced Digital Systems, 20204 State Road, Cerritos, CA 90701. 1-800-888-5244.)

Aztech Labs has a new product that sells for 25% less than the company's NX PRO 16. The Sound Galaxy PRO 16 should retail for around $200, and comes with a microphone, headphones, Windows 3.1 drivers, and a variety of bundled software. (Aztech Labs, Inc., 46707 Fremont Blvd., Fremont, CA 94538. (510) 623-8989.)

Computer combat pilots have a new joystick to put through the paces. **CH Products's** Flightstick Pro is an improved version of the company's Flightstick. The Flightstick Pro's features a 4-way viewing toggle switch, a trigger, and three function buttons and is compatible with the latest generation of flight sims. CH Products is also busy promoting their new X and Y cables (which sell for $11.95 and $12.95 respectively). The X cable extends your joystick reach by ten feet, while the Y cable lets you use two joysticks in one game port. (CH Products, 970 Park Center Drive, Vista, CA 92083. (619) 598-2518.)

Flightstick Pro

Koss has long been a force in home audio, particularly where headphones are concerned. Now they're turning their attention to computers, and have engineered a line of speakers and headphones specifically for the PC market. Koss's new HD/6 computer speakers have 4-inch drivers and retail for $99. The HD/2 stereophones ($29.99) are designed to extend high and low frequencies for improved performance. Koss's Sonic Boom stereophones have a built-in microphone for use in voice-activated programs. The Sonic Boom line contains three models ranging from $49.99 to $19.99. (Koss Corp., 4129 North Port Washington Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53212. (414) 964-5000.)

In our July/August issue, we mentioned **C&D Programming Corp.'s** *CacheAll* caching utility. We reported that *CacheAll*'s introductory price of $79 would jump to $129 after July 31. But C&D has extended the lower introductory price indefinitely. If you're interested in *CacheAll*, give C&D a call to make sure the $79 price is still in effect. (C&D Programming Corp., 1611 Mayfair Circle, PO Box 581012, Salt Lake City, UT 84158. (800) 847-5676.)

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Microsoft Home

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EIGHT BALL DELUXE

Publisher: Amtex **Developer:** Amtex

Rating:

Wine connoisseurs and car enthusiasts aren't alone in appreciating classics. Pinball fans can be just as discriminating.

Take Bally's "Eight Ball Deluxe." Since its 1981 introduction, it's hooked thousands of dedicated pinballers. Now, thanks to Amtex, you can savor this classic flipperfest on your PC.

The Amtex design team was faced with a thorny problem — how to cram the pinball table onto a PC monitor. There's no perfect solution: Either the machine must be radically scaled down so a single PC screen can accommodate the table's naturally long and narrow dimensions, or a scrolling screen must be employed to keep the graphics large and satisfying.

Amtex opted for a scrolling system based on the ball's movement. The scrolling is remarkably clean and smooth, and playing with only part of the table in view soon becomes second nature. There's one big drawback to this approach, though. If you're cradling the ball with a flipper, trying to hit a chute or some other object anywhere in the upper two-thirds of the table, you can't see the target to line up your shot.

If you play using only the flippers, it might seem that the ball tends to drain down the right and left chutes quite a bit. But your average pinball fanatic knows a thing or two about body English, and that's where the space bar comes in. Pressing it nudges the table, which can help save a fair percentage of balls that would normally be lost. Just as in real life, a little practice will help cut down on the number of balls needlessly lost down either side.

Amtex should be applauded for its commitment to replicating the pinball experience. Superb audio digitally duplicates all the quirky bells, bumpers, flipper clicks, and other noises associated with pinball, and the colorful graphics convey just the right perspective and feel.

Eight Ball Deluxe is easy to play, with shift keys controlling flipper functions. The only part of the interface I dislike is the stingy scoreboard — it only displays the current ball score. If you're playing with friends, you may have a difficult time remembering who's winning and who's losing. Nothing stymies cutthroat pinball competition like poorly designed scorekeeping.

Eight Ball Deluxe kicks off Amtex's Pinball Classics series, and if the next editions (*Funhouse* and *Royal Flush*) are as good as this, Amtex should win the hard-earned loyalty of pinball fans everywhere. *Eight Ball Deluxe* makes satisfying your urge for pinball action as easy as booting up your PC. It's a hands-down winner.

—Phill Powell

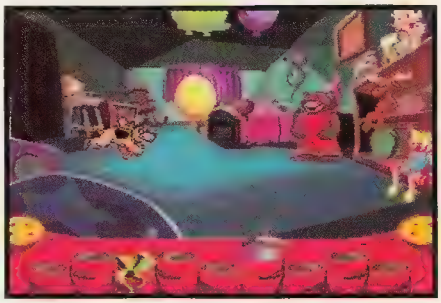
Amtex, P.O. Box 572, Belleville, Ontario Canada K8N 5B2

FATTY BEAR'S BIRTHDAY SURPRISE

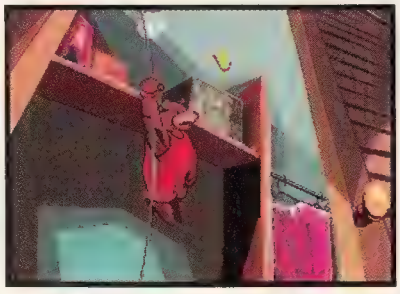
Publisher: Humongous Entertainment **Developer:** Humongous Entertainment

Rating:

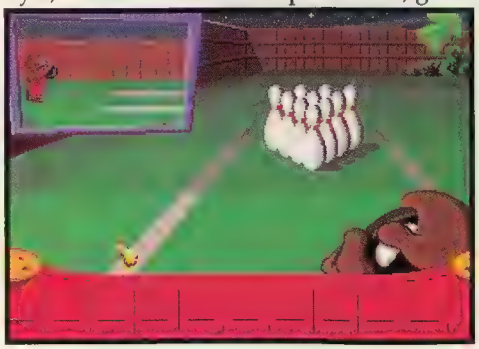
Following up an outstanding debut is always a tough job. Humongous Entertainment received very high marks for *Putt Putt Joins the Parade*, the company's first title and the introduction to its Junior Adventure line of educational games. But *Fatty Bear's Birthday Surprise*, the second Junior Adventure game, scores just as high as the impressive *Putt Putt*.



Like *Putt Putt*, *Fatty Bear* is a charming, humorous, and beautifully rendered game for kids ages 3-7. Music and sound — including a superb implementation of character voices — are especially strong, as is the abundant and clever use of animation.



The child plays the role of Fatty Bear, a stuffed animal that comes to life after his owner, a little girl named Kayla, drifts off to sleep the night before her birthday. Fatty Bear and several of Kayla's dolls and stuffed animals work through the night to bake and decorate a cake, and make a Happy Birthday sign before Kayla awakens.



Fatty Bear finds plenty of interesting diversions as he makes his preparations and Kayla's family sleeps. There's a piano to play, a bowling game in the yard, an aquarium with a variety of comical inhabitants, and much more. Fortunately, there's no time limit, so a child can spend as much time playing as he or she wants.

Baking the cake requires finding the right ingredients, some of which aren't in the kitchen — or even in the house. There's also a mischievous puppy (Kayla's birthday present from her parents) that breaks out of his gift box and runs off with some of the letters for the Happy Birthday sign, leaving them scattered throughout the house and yard.

Thanks to the outstanding animations and enchanting sound effects, even a three-year-old will have great fun just moving around and exploring; kids seven and older will clearly understand their mission, and with a little persistence, get to see Kayla's birthday surprise. Hats off to Humongous for another excellent children's game!

— Lance Elko

Humongous Entertainment, 1310 NE 177TH Place, #180, Woodinville WA 98072

ADVANCED SQUAD LEADER GAME ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Publisher: Avalon Hill **Developer:** Avalon Hill

Rating:

War games like *Gary Grigsby's Pacific War* and the *V for Victory* trilogy might seem complex, but they can't hold a candle to the intricacies of Advanced Squad Leader (ASL). Published by The Avalon Hill Game Company, ASL is a tabletop simulation of World War II combat at the squad level. The title doesn't refer to any single game but rather embraces a line of modules, each providing maps and counters to recreate battles in a particular theater. The centerpiece of the whole production, though, is the ASL manual, a 100-plus page compilation of rules, charts, and tables packaged in a three-ringed binder and sold as a stand-alone product.

Since the release of the rulebook and the first module back in 1985, this game system has attracted a fanatical following, as might well be expected. Who but a true zealot would have the patience and fortitude to commit so many rules to memory? But with the introduction of the *Advanced Squad Leader Game Assistance Program (GAP)*, Avalon Hill has made life a little easier for seasoned ASL vets and novices alike.

The *GAP* is designed to ease the burden on players by allowing the computer to shoulder some of their responsibilities during a game. For instance, it can keep a running tally of casualties for each side and also alert players when reinforcements are due to arrive. But the program's most useful service is its ability to resolve combat. The *GAP* can handle infantry, ordnance, and close-combat attacks. In each instance, the program prompts the user to enter all modifiers to the attack and then displays the results. It also alerts the player to the possibility of any secondary events the attack may have triggered, such as a weapon breakdown or sniper activation.

One of the *GAP*'s best features is that most prompts and messages carry a reference number directing the user to the relevant section in the rules. So even if you can't remember how to conduct an Anti-Tank Magnetic Mine Availability Check, at least you know where to look in the manual for a brief refresher.

Of course, the *GAP* is no substitute for a solid familiarity with the rules. While the program can save players the trouble of rolling the dice and consulting the proper tables themselves, they'll still have to spend a few seconds — or more — at the keyboard, entering the requested data. In many types of combat, experienced players could probably resolve the attack faster without the program.

For this reason, I suspect the *Game Assistance Program* will appeal most to those who are still learning the ASL system, and have yet to reach the point where they can recite whole passages from the manual by heart. The *GAP* is a great memory aid for newcomers, ensuring that they apply all of those rare or hard-to-remember rules. And let's face it: In a rulebook the size of Advanced Squad Leader's, there's bound to be plenty of both.

— Jeff Seiken

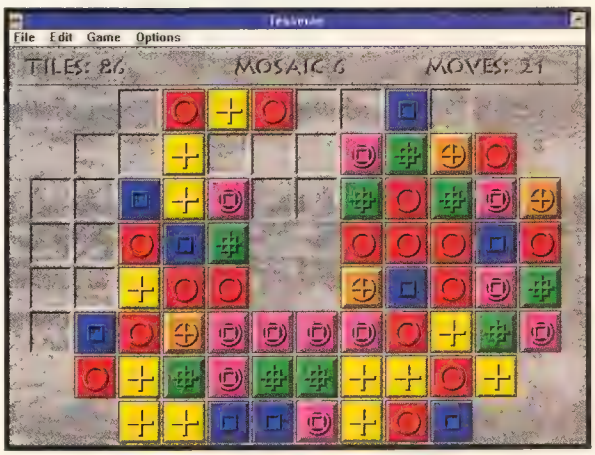
The Avalon Hill Game Company, 4517 Harford Road, Baltimore MD 21214

TESSERAE

Publisher: Gametek **Developer:** Inline Design

Rating:

This single-player puzzle-game for Windows teases the brain with its challenging application of color theory. The premise is very straightforward. You're presented with a mosaic of colorful, patterned tiles, which you flip over adjacent squares in order to remove other tiles from the board. The object is to remove all the tiles save one in as few moves as possible.

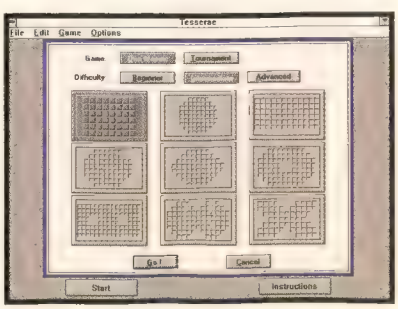


The difficulty lies in the details. Tiles come in three varieties — primary, secondary, and tertiary colors — each with its own distinct capabilities when it comes to removing other tiles. Primary colors can remove nearly any color of tile, but secondary and tertiary tiles can only jump over tiles in the same color family. If the landing space is empty, the jumping tile occupies it without changing color; if it isn't, the tile takes on the characteristics of the new tile and changes into a secondary (orange, purple, green) or tertiary color (black).

To provide players with variety, the game offers three levels of difficulty on nine different mosaic patterns. Many players will spend most of their time in the intermediate level; the expert level offers a particularly tough challenge. Within each mosaic and difficulty level is a nearly infinite number of tile arrangements. A tournament mode also is available in which all nine grids must be completed in order.

Although it doesn't break new ground, *Tesserae* has all the elements of a very solid puzzler. A scorekeeping feature keeps a running record of your best games, based on both the number of tiles left at the end of a game and the number of moves made. When you successfully complete a puzzle, you're rewarded with a nifty little fireworks display. And if all the brainwork gets to be a bit too much, you can always check out the "About Tesserae" file for a healthy dose of comic relief.

— Gary James



Gametek, 2999 NE 191 Street, Suite 800, North Miami Beach FL 33180

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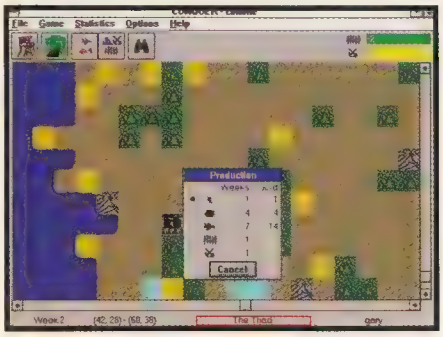
Product Information Number 134

CONQUER FOR WINDOWS

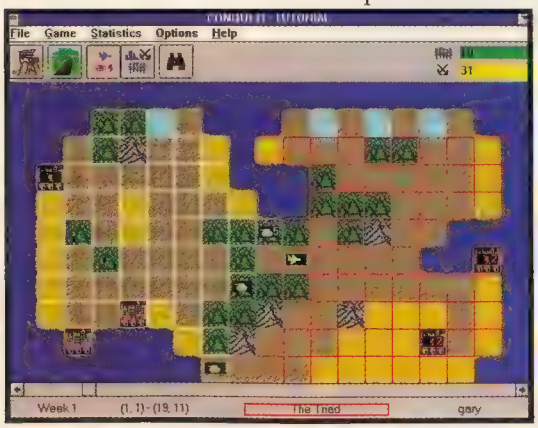
Publisher: Elpin Systems **Developer:** Elpin Systems

Rating:

Armchair strategists have been conquering the world for years with several first-rate computer games. Now, with Elpin System's release of *Conquer for Windows*, gamers can take over the globe at the very same time that they're crunching numbers with a spreadsheet.



Conquer takes full advantage of the sounds and graphics resolution available in the Windows 3.1 environment. With resolution as high as 1024 x 768, the maps, icons, and menus are as sharp as any you'll see. Even in lower resolutions, down to 640 x 480, the graphics are as crisp as you could want.



The scenario is familiar: You begin the game with one city in an uncharted world. You must explore the surrounding terrain, build cities, and control production of natural resources. Cities provide the military units — including infantry, tanks, planes, and ships — necessary to crush your opponents.

Movement of units is almost effortless, and you can designate automatic deployment of units from each city. The action is simultaneous, so don't take too much time pondering your moves — your opponents are moving and attacking at the same time.

The game lends itself to a variety of strategies: You can adopt a defensive posture, unleash a blitzkrieg of tanks, concentrate on long-range aircraft, or churn out infantry to slug it out in the trenches.

But when all is said and done, production is the key to victory in *Conquer*. The player must have enough land devoted to agriculture and mining to sustain the armies, while building enough cities to crank out the needed military units.

The game can be played solo against as many as three computer opponents. In addition, up to four people can play over a network, or two human opponents can play via modem, with computer opponents rounding out the field of four armies.

There's nothing new here in terms of game play, but *Conquer for Windows* brings it all together in a seamless and attractive environment that's a breeze to learn and master.

— Lee Buchanan

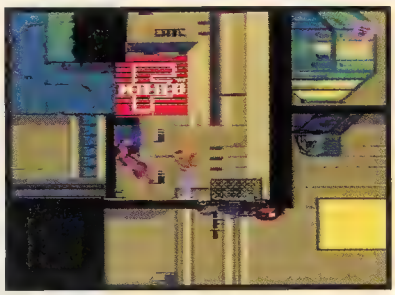
Elpin Systems, 45 S. Park Victoria, Suite 401, Milpitas, CA 95035

FLASHBACK: THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY

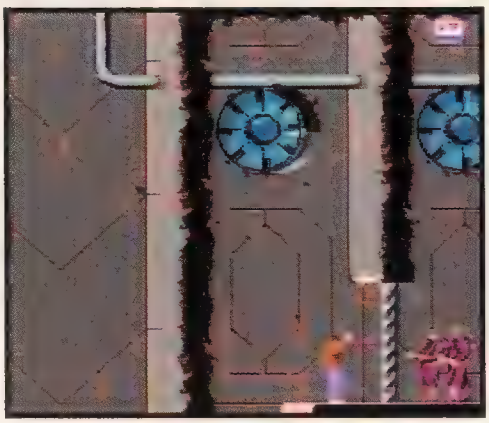
Publisher: SSI **Developer:** Delphine Software

Rating:

If you're one of the players who fell for *Out of This World*, the first American release from French development team Delphine Software, you're going to love this latest creation. *Flashback* has all the excitement of *Out of This World*, and then some. Add better graphics, smoother animation, and more puzzles, and you've got the makings of a first-class action game.



Flashback first appeared on the Sega Genesis, and except for a richer palette (256 colors on the PC instead of 64) and a Zoom option that gives you an extreme closeup view of the mayhem, this is pretty much a direct port. One of the most impressive things about this version is that SSI (which played a major role in the PC translation) has managed to retain the frame rate of the cartridge game. I played *Flashback* on a 286/12, a 386SX/16, and a 486/33, and except in Zoom mode, the frame rate on all three machines was as fast as it was in the Genesis version.



Delphine is earning a reputation for creating games with a cinematic flair, so it's only fitting that the plot of *Flashback* combines elements of *They Live*, *Total Recall*, and *Running Man*. You play as Conrad Hart, a scientist who's developed special glasses that reveal the molecular density of any object or person. With them, Conrad has discovered that many high-ranking government officials are in fact aliens — who immediately kidnap him and erase his memory. As the game opens, Conrad has just escaped on a space bike, grabbing a pistol and a holocube as he fled. The holocube contains just enough information to get you started. As you progress in the game, you pick up clues that tell you what to do next.

There are lots of puzzles scattered throughout *Flashback*, but the real stars of the show are the gunplay and the animation. You have to blast your way through scores of mutants and guards, and the various animations — drawing your pistol, clubbing an enemy with the gun-butt, the recoil after squeezing off a shot — are as good as in a cartoon.

The only weak part of the game is the Save feature. Though you can temporarily save a game at various points in each level, the only time you can save and exit the game is at the end of a level — and some of these levels are *long*. Other than that, *Flashback* is an action gamer's delight.

— Stephen Poole

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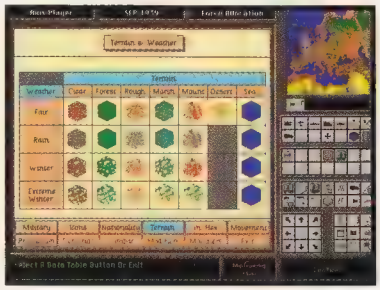
HIGH COMMAND

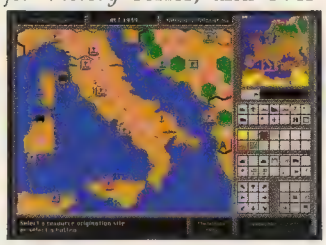
Publisher: 360 Pacific **Developer:** Colorado Computer Creations

Rating:

High Command succeeds like no other computer game at combining diplomacy, research and development, production, and economics with the messy business of clashing armies. The original game was developed by a pair of wargamers at Colorado Computer Creations; sporting an effective design with bare-bones graphics and a ho-hum interface, it pointed toward great things to come.



That promise has now been fulfilled with the total revamping and re-release of *High Command* by 360 Pacific. A slick new interface, Super VGA graphics reminiscent of the *V for Victory* series, and overhauled artificial intelligence routines bring an already good game to outstanding new levels. It is no less than a grand-strategic *V for Victory* — and as fans of that series know, that's saying a lot.



There's a hint of Parker Brothers' "beginner" board war game Axis and Allied in *High Command*, with its research and development component and large-scale, simplified combat. But where that game stops, *High Command* piles on levels of detail and multiple action phases. Each month-long game round is split into multiple allocation and execution phases, representing movement of troops, allocation of resources and economic points, and multiple air, naval, and land movement and combat phases.

This complex web of action and reaction requires foresight and planning. You must maintain your economy by plowing at least half of the production points back into it, while at the same time cultivating diplomatic relations, practicing espionage, and cranking out new combat units. Long-term research plans yield better weapons and, eventually, the A-bomb. You can sling armored divisions at the enemy until the cows come home, but if your offensive efforts aren't backed up by careful diplomacy and meticulous economics, you're dead.

The new *High Command* interface employs easy-to-use buttons and toggles, greatly simplifying and streamlining the original design. The graphics are slick and much more effective. Overall geography and urban areas are more clearly rendered, and the constant access to both strategic and tactical maps makes tracking your progress a snap. The artificial intelligence routines were apparently improved, but the opposition is still a bit timid at times.

Thanks to its superior interface and greatly enhanced graphics, game play is both easier and more satisfying. While the original incarnation of *High Command* was an intriguing game with loads of potential, the new version is one of the best grand-strategic computer games on the market.

— T. Liam McDonald

360 Pacific, 2105 S. Bascom Avenue, Suite 380, Campbell CA 95008

INDYCAR RACING

SNEAK PreView

Publisher: Papyrus Publishing **Developer:** Papyrus Publishing

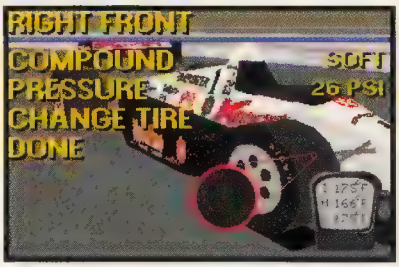
With the upcoming *IndyCar Racing*, Papyrus Publishing hopes to establish a new standard for racing simulations. The latest design from Papyrus, which created *Indy 500* several years ago, should be in stores by October of this year. Compared to the previous production, *IndyCar Racing* promises more tracks and easier driving, with the most realistic look and feel ever offered in a PC racing game.

Extensive texture-mapped graphics and a physics-based chassis model provide an incredibly authentic driving experience. Rejecting the sparse, polygonal look of previous racing sims, *IndyCar Racing* recreates the details of all the top Indy cars — from their paint schemes and lettering down to individual decals. The tracks carefully model the banking, radius, and elevation changes of each turn, adding replicas of correct billboards and even duplicating the texture of the grass adjoining the pavement. More than 30 options for car set-up add to the realism of the simulation.

Expect *IndyCar Racing* to be loaded with features to make game play more fun. A la *World Circuit*, novice drivers will enjoy an array of driving aids for assistance in learning new tracks, including auto-braking, auto-shifting, and steering help. With all the enabled, the car virtually drives itself — but only at mid-field performance. Running at the front of the pack will only be possible in expert mode, with every aid turned off.

With eight different tracks included and seven more available in an add-on package, *IndyCar Racing* can simulate an entire season of competition. The tracks duplicate the variety that faces actual IndyCar drivers: half are oval tracks, and half are road-racing circuits. For head-to-head racing, a modem play option will also be offered.

While *Indy 500* and *World Circuit* provide tolerable performance on 286-based PCs, *IndyCar Racing* needs a minumum 386 processor and 2 megabytes of RAM. To experience the full impact of the texture-mapped graphics will require the additional horsepower of a 486.



Advance information about *IndyCar Racing*, plus support and updates for *Indy 500*, are available on Papyrus' electronic bulletin board, at 617-576-7472.

— Tim Victor

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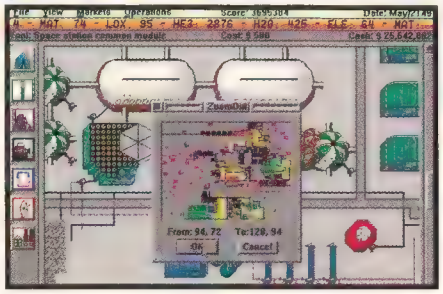
Product Information Number 127

LUNAR COMMAND

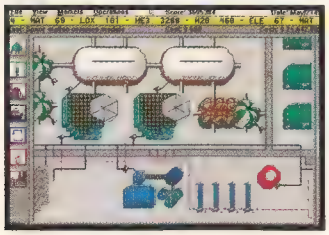
Publisher: Mallard Software **Developer:** Mallard Software

Rating:

Mallard Software's *Lunar Command* is part of the growing genre of Software Toys. Eschewing the notion of winning or losing, the simulation has a simple goal: to create a self-supporting moon colony. Each year's financial balance sheet tells how well a player has done, and your running score increases or decreases based on these results. But that's as judgmental as the program gets.



The game allows you to try different strategies for building a moonbase, emphasizing scientific exploration, commercial manufacturing, or even tourism to generate income for



the base. You decide whether an approach was successful, and a game can go on for as long as it remains interesting.

Players who actually put a lot of time into reading program manuals might be put off by *Lunar Command*. The manual consists of a rather long (and not terribly relevant) fictional background story, followed by lists of the power, staffing, and supply requirement for each structure. It suggests that the simulation requires a lot of attention to small details; in fact, the program conveniently summarizes all these figures as play goes on, and it's actually quite easy to get your moonbase started.

The habitats, power plants, factories, and roads that make up the lunar colony are positioned using a convenient mouse-driven graphical interface. Resupply levels, sales of manufactured goods, and other budgetary decisions are made through menus and dialogue boxes that should be familiar to most PC gamers. *Lunar Command* is also very tolerant of beginners' mistakes. If the outpost fails to turn a profit, lowered resupply levels cut into the next year's productivity, but a couple years of sound management decisions can still turn the moribund colony around.

Lunar Command is an easy program to learn, but some players might wish for more depth in the simulation's model. A game has no fixed ending, although it eventually reaches a point where there's little reason to continue. The program is basically an economic simulation, and once the moon's surface is covered with roads and buildings, there's little to do except maximize trading profits by keeping your eye on the commodities ticker, and making small adjustments in production capacity.

Lunar Command might look familiar to faithful *PC Entertainment* readers. The same basic program was released as *Moonbase* a couple of years ago by Wesson International, though it's been spiffed up a bit for its re-release. With improved sound and other new features, it plays very well in its latest incarnation.

— Tim Victor

Mallard Software, 3207 Justin Road, Flower Mound, TX 75028

BATTLE CHESS 4000

Publisher: Interplay **Developer:** Interplay

Rating:

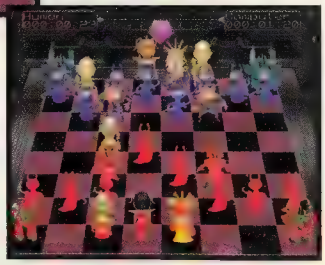
Battle Chess began as a spectator's delight on the Amiga several years ago, and has become something of a PC chess staple. Its charm, then as now, lies in its animated captures. You don't just slide onto an opponent's square to capture a piece in this game; You march the piece over and the two enemies perform a richly animated battle, complete with extensive sound effects. The battles are humorous (if sometimes gruesome), and while they don't affect the outcome of the game, they add luster and novelty.

Battle Chess 4000 takes the concept into the realm of science-fiction, utilizing very impressive SVGA graphics. This is still chess — the same rules,

the same openings, and the same pieces — but instead of the medieval fantasy figures of the first *Battle Chess*, we now have a space-station full of highly stylized, sci-fi-looking...uh, beings.

The chess pieces were created by photographing and digitizing clay models. Pawns are slug like wormy things, and knights are pug-ugly space cowboys. The queen is sort of a combination Miss Piggy/Princess Leia, while the rook resembles a very high-tech Transformer. Their capture animations are varied and interesting, and as always you'll play the first few games just to watch the battle sequences.

And that's been the problem with *Battle Chess* since its introduction. It's so much fun to watch, you rarely get around to serious playing. If you do, though, the game plays very well, and you can switch to an unusually attractive 2-dimensional board to remove the temptation of reverting to demolition-derby chess. A modem option allows you to play against a friend, the game's opening library contains several hundred thousand moves, and the program even adds especially noteworthy moves to its library as it plays. You can set the computer to play for a draw, you can ask it for (always useful) hints, and you can test yourself for an ELO grading by engag-



ing in a 4-move exercise.

It would be nice to have an option, in fact, to install only the chess game itself, easing the required 13 megabytes of hard disk space. As it stands, though, *Battle Chess 4000* is a strong addition to any chess-lover's collection — and, as always, a superb way to show off your computer.

— Neil Randall

Interplay Productions, 17922 Fitch Avenue, Irvine CA 92714

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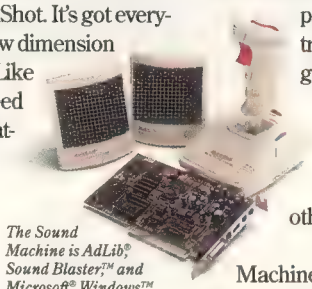

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Product Information Number 119

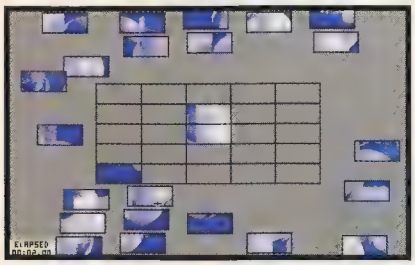
FLIXMIX

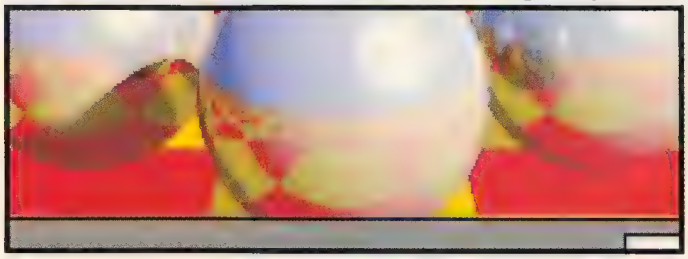
Publisher: Celeris **Developer:** Celeris

Rating:

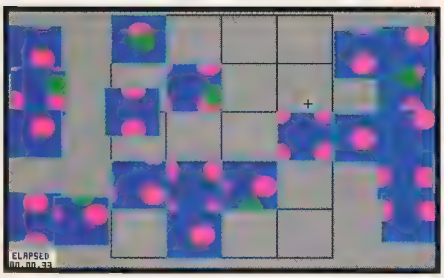
Here's a game that does everything right — it just doesn't do *enough* of it.

Celeris's *FlixMix* is a jigsaw game with animated puzzles. Balls rotate, puddles ripple,





geometric shapes twist, and squiggly lines...well, *squiggle*. The animations are broken into pieces and, like a regular jigsaw puzzle, you assemble them to form a complete picture. An options menu lets you customize single-player games by determining time limits, number of puzzle pieces, whether or not correctly placed pieces lock into place, whether pieces need to be flipped or rotated, and so on. Since each jigsaw piece is animated, it can be challenging — and tough on the eyes — to figure out their relationship to each other, as well as to the overall image.



There are four ways to play *FlixMix*: Single Mingle and Scramblecade are single-player affairs, while Joint Venture and Mix and Match can accommodate up to nine players. Single Mingle is low-pressure play with no time limit. In Scramblecade you're under a time limit, but you can score extra points for placing pieces quickly in certain squares. Once you complete the circuit of nine puzzles, you begin again — but this time pieces must be rotated or flipped. Joint Venture is a cooperative effort, as players take turns trying to solve the puzzles. And in Mix and Match the players take turns, but each is trying to solve the puzzles on his or her own.

FlixMix can be a lot of fun, especially in the Scramblecade mode. The problem is that there are only nine different images, and no matter how many options or modes of play you're given, there are still only nine puzzles. If you play the game frequently, you'll quickly grow tired of the scenery. And in the competitive modes, newcomers are at a real disadvantage to veterans who have solved the puzzles a few times.

If it had more variety, *FlixMix* would be a winner. It's still a unique and entertaining game, but one that quickly loses its appeal.

— Leslie Mizell

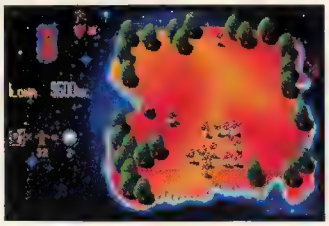
Celeris Inc., 21995 Plummer St., Chatsworth, CA 91311

MEGA LO MANIA

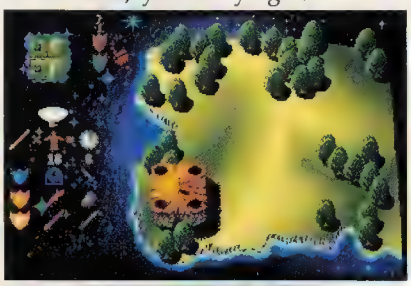
Publisher: UBI Soft **Developer:** Sensible Software

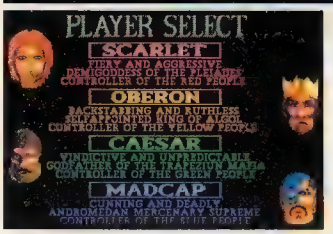
Rating:

Mega lo Mania is a mix of *Populous* and *Powermonger*, with a dash of "The Flintstones" thrown in for good measure. Using distinctly cartoonish graphics and sound effects, *Mega lo Mania* creates a wacked-out atmosphere wholly ancillary to the game itself. Sometimes it feels as though you're trying to battle a Monty Python cartoon.



In fact, you're vying for





the title of God of a new civilization, battling against three other aspiring deities. Godship is awarded to the combatant who gains total control of a newly formed planet by winning a series of 28 battles. The battles take place on islands — three per epoch over the course of nine epochs, with a decisive "Mother of Battles" on the 28th island.

After you choose which of four would-be gods will represent you, the game begins. You're allotted 100 human followers at the beginning of each epoch, and you must decide how many men you'll use in the conquest of each island. Men left over at the end of an epoch will be carried over to the next, and join your forces there.

You'll direct your followers to perform a number of tasks during each battle, such as combat, defense, research, and mining. Soldiers are needed to conquer neighboring territories, while defenders protect the home turf. Scientists work hard at creating offensive and defensive weapons; as they make new discoveries your technology level increases, and new and better weapons become available. Offensive technologies range from rocks to flying saucers, while defensive weapons run the gamut from sticks to SDI.

Certain weapons can only be built from mineral resources, and that's where mining comes into play. If the territory you choose at the beginning of battle is poor in minerals, too bad. Start conquering your neighbors and take theirs!

Mega lo Mania is a slight game, neither very good nor very bad. It's kind of fun for a while, mostly because of the madcap graphics and elementary game play. But the island conquests soon settle into a rather tedious pattern of research, building weapons, and bashing the other guy. The only strategic challenge lies in winning with as few men as possible and hoarding forces for the final battle, and that gets old fast. To make matters worse, the save function is lousy, and the only way to quit the game is by resetting the computer (no CTRL+ALT+DEL here!), which is a real pain. All things considered, it's hard to recommend this one.

— T. Liam McDonald

UBI Soft, 1505 Bridgeway, Suite 105, Sausalito, CA 94965

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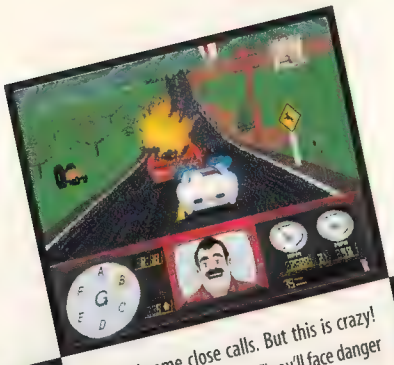

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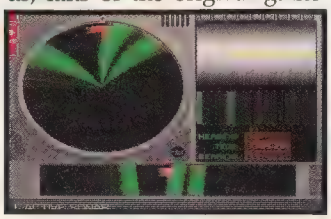
SSN-21 SEAWOLF

PreView

Publisher: Electronic Arts **Developer:** Electronic Arts

SSN-21 Seawolf is the sequel to the popular *688 Attack Sub*, and judging from the preview version Electronic Arts provided us, fans of the original game have reason to celebrate. Besides its rich 256-color VGA graphics and streamlined interface, *Seawolf* allows players to operate a piece of high-tech weaponry that's still in the design stages — always a treat for military buffs.



The game is set during the next few years, with a premise no less realistic than any other we've seen. The USSR has reunified, and a pro-U.S. coup has taken Cuba from Fidel Castro. As the Soviet task force makes its way to Cuba to reestablish Castro's power, the unthinkable happens: World War III.

Well, perhaps it isn't an extremely *likely* scenario, but as in most simulations of modern military craft, the strength of *Seawolf* is its playability — no mean feat considering the complexity of ultramodern submarines. You're in command of the full range of your sub's operations, from weapons management to target determination, but the game masks the complexity of all this activity through a well-designed series of menus. From the weapons menu, for example, you can individually load and/or flood the torpedo tubes and fire the weapons at a selected target, all with mouse clicks. Similar mouse-based sequences let you chart your course, move to attack, dive to periscope depth, and issue orders to subordinates.

The WWIII campaign consists of 33 missions, but novices needn't not jump right in. A series of training missions gently introduces you to the finer points of the simulation, and you can play individual missions before attempting the full campaign. Two-player missions are also available, with a modem option for players who don't have an opponent handy.

Seawolf's graphics are quite strong, and sound effects are very convincing. Through support for a wide variety of sound boards (including specific support for the Advanced Gravis Ultrasound and the ProAudio Spectrum 16), players can hear over 100 digitized samples. Put on your headphones, crank up the volume, and be prepared to be taken aback when one of your crew shouts, "Oh my God!" the first time you're hit. Then again, the excitement generated by your first kill might be a little more pleasant to the ear.

If all this has you excited, you don't have long to wait: *SSN-21 Seawolf* is expected to ship sometime in October. Look for complete coverage in our next issue.

— Neil Randall

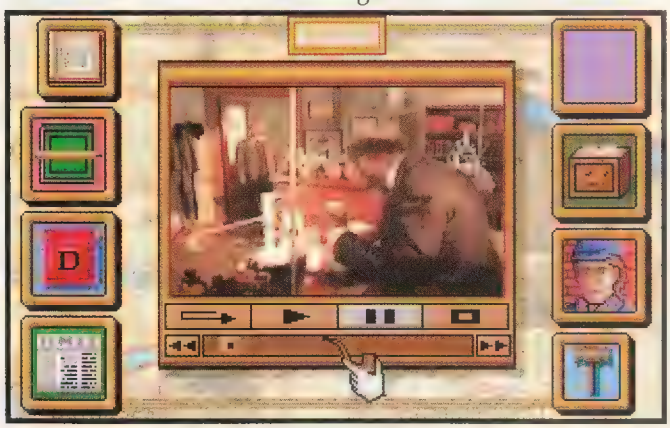
Electronic Arts, 1450 Fashion Island Blvd., San Mateo, CA 94404-2064

SHERLOCK HOLMES, CONSULTING DETECTIVE VOLUME III

Publisher: ICOM Simulations **Developer:** ICOM Simulations

Rating:

Sherlock Holmes, Consulting Detective was one of the first CD-ROM games to make a splash, due in no small part to the fact that it was bundled with just about every CD-ROM player sold. With *Volume III*, the series has come to an end. ICOM Simulations is moving on to *Dracula Unleashed*, featuring much of the same video technology that made the *Holmes* games popular, and *The 7th Guest* has supplanted *Holmes* as the "gee-whiz!" CD-ROM product.



Each volume of *Consulting Detective* contains three separate mysteries. Extensive video sequences bring each case to life, with live actors playing Holmes, Watson, and other characters. You visit places and learn information about the mystery at hand. Video sequences revealing important facts and clues are triggered when you visit the right locations, and each bit of information leads you closer to solving the case. You develop and follow leads using the phone book, Holmes' notebook, the Baker Street Irregulars (street urchins who dig up information for you) or Holmes' files. When you have all the information, you go to court and see that the suspects are brought to justice.

The period costumes and sets used in these video sequences have improved with each new volume of *Holmes*, and are very good in *Volume III*. The acting is better, too, and rarely gets as melodramatic as it was in the original edition. The scenes are quite entertaining despite their 15-frames-per-second speed, and the interface is functional but undistinguished.

The courtroom segments can be pretty frustrating. Even if you've figured out who committed the crime, the court proceedings will not continue until certain video scenes have been viewed. Still, the game award points for successfully solving the case while visiting the fewest number of suspects! This scoring seems intended to keep you coming back for more, trying to get a better score. But few gamers will replay a mystery once they know whodunit!

These gripes aside, *Holmes* is quite entertaining. The video clips, acting, and backgrounds are very good. Unfortunately, a compact disc can only hold so much video. Like the others in the series, the three mysteries in *Volume III* are all of about average difficulty, and together have a total playing time of two-and-a-half hours. *Holmes Volume III* is good while it lasts; it just doesn't last long enough.

— T. Liam McDonald

ICOM Simulations, 648 South Wheeling Rd., Wheeling, IL 60090

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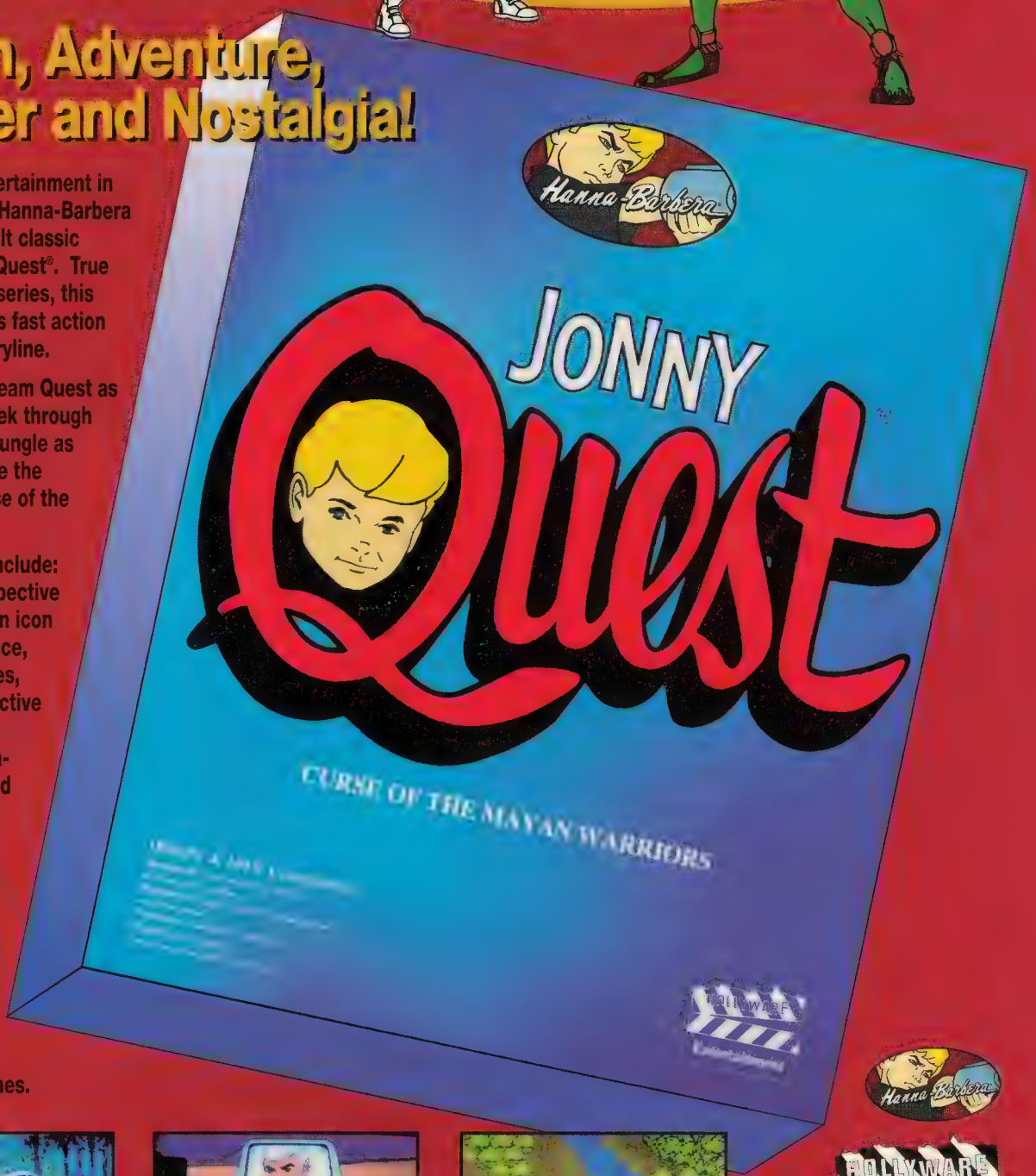

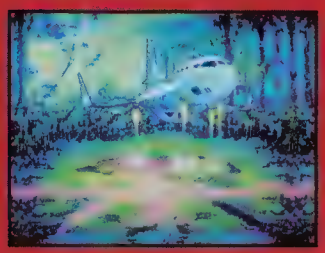

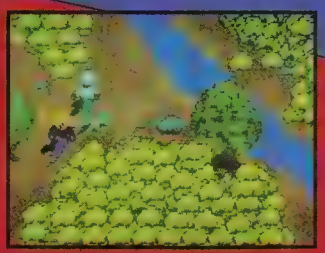

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Product Information Number 130

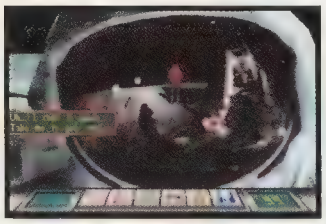
ETERNAM

Developer: Infogrames **Publisher:** Capstone

Rating:

Leave it to the company who brought you *Alone in the Dark* to thumb its nose at the conventions of the graphic adventure genre. At a time when point-and-click interfaces are almost a given, *Eternam* has zero mouse support. Instead of forcing you to scour every inch of a location with an icon in search of objects and information, *Eternam* tells you what an object is — and even draws a line to it. And what other developer would liberally lace a graphic adventure with blindingly fast (and mandatory) arcade sequences?

Of course, all these quirks beg the question: Is *Eternam* fun to play? The answer, appropriately enough, is yes and no. The lack of mouse support is no



problem; controlling Don Jonz, your on-screen persona, is a breeze with the keyboard. And the arcade sequences lend a frantic atmosphere that you don't find in many graphic adventures. But the stripped-down interface severely limits your ability to explore the often surreal game world, and as a result *Eternam* doesn't quite live up to its potential.

As Don Jonz, you're vacationing on Eternam, a planet sort of like Westworld: It's designed so that you can live out adventures without the accompanying dangers. But intergalactic gangster Mikhail Nuke has taken over the Control center, turning the planet into a huge death trap. The game is forgiving in the early stages — if you can't solve a puzzle, you're given a very helpful hint.

Throughout your travels you'll meet unique characters, brought to life through their tendency to tell you all their troubles and desires. But the initial excitment fizzles a little over halfway into the game , where you'll run into several puzzles with *extremely* obscure solutions (I was unable to solve one of them even with hintbook in hand!) The interface, though simple to use, is also frustrating: Use the Look command, and you're told "There's nothing to see!" even when you're standing in front of several items. It's as though the designers didn't want to write descriptions for anything you don't absolutely need.

Still, you've got to admire *Eternam*'s zany sense of humor, and if you've got the time and patience you'll find it can be a lot of fun.

— *Stephen Poole*

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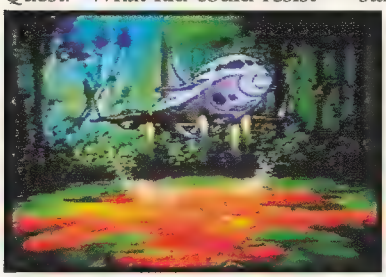
Sneak Preview

JONNY QUEST

Developer: Hollyware Entertainment **Publisher:** Hollyware Entertainment

As a kid growing up in the late sixties and early seventies, one of my all-time favorite Saturday-morning cartoons was Hanna Barbera's "Jonny Quest." What kid could resist



it? The opening sequence alone was enough to hook most of us. As a big band wailed out the jazzy theme music over a tribal drumbeat, highlights from different episodes would be shown — pterodactyls screeching and swooping, poisonous snakes slithering toward Johnny and Hadji, villainous frogmen being flung from their high-speed motorboat after hitting an obstacle — and if you hadn't seen those episodes, you sure wanted to by the time the title screen faded!

"Jonny Quest" has made something of a comeback in the past year, with old episodes popping up in syndication and a new, full-length feature film appearing on the USA Network over the summer. Now Hollyware Entertainment is bringing Johnny, Hadji, Dr. Quest, Race Bannon, and Bandit to your PC with *Jonny Quest: Curse of the Mayan Warriors*.

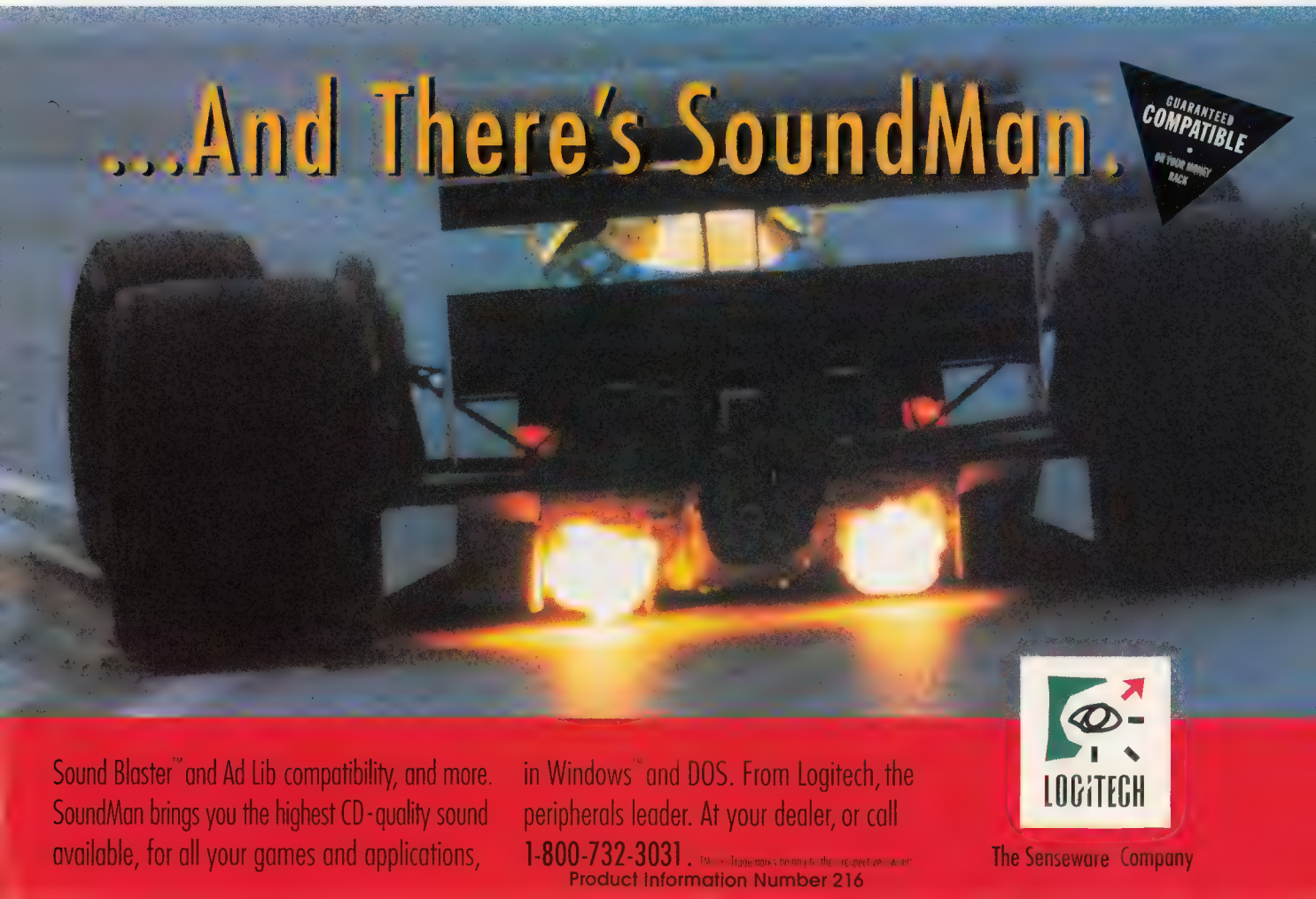
In this action adventure, you guide Jonny, Hadji, and Bandit through the jungles of Guatemala, trying to learn the reason for the mysterious disappearance of ancient Mayan artifacts. The travels through the jungle are displayed with an overhead 3-D perspective; when you meet someone with whom you can interact, the view switches to first-person. Hollyware worked closely with Hanna Barbera in developing the game, and fans of the show will love the scenes that have been digitized from the original cartoon. And in keeping with the two-fisted flavor of the show, there's a good dose of arcade action thrown into the mix. The artwork during these scenes is especially good — Hollyware has obviously spent a lot of time trying to re-create the wonderful look of the show.

Jonny hears the voices of Mr. Quest, Race, and his dad in the hut.

Hollyware is planning to ship *Curse of the Mayan Warriors* during the latter part of August, so look for complete coverage in our next issue.

— *Stephen Poole*

Hollyware, 13464 Washington Blvd., Marina del Rey, CA 90291



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RETURN TO ZORK

THIS AIN'T YOUR DADDY'S GAME!

Or How I Learned to Stop Whining About Text Parsers and Love the Bomb

Matthew A. Firme

West of House
You are standing in an open field west of a white house, with a boarded front door.
There is a mailbox here.

The original *Zork*, considered by many to be the forebear of all computer adventure games, began with nothing more than these few lines of descriptive text on a blank computer screen. No graphics, no music, no sound effects: When you played *Zork*, all of those sensual details were up to you. You had to imagine the scene before you, visualizing the objects, doorways, and obstacles in a given situation and then — placing *yourself* in that situation — you had to figure out what to do next.

Once you decided on a course of action, you had to type your instructions into the text parser — the only interface available. "Open Door," you might say. "Enter Door. Go West. Examine Bathroom."

It was a far cry from today's slick, icon-based interfaces and knockout graphics. But, at the risk of sounding like Dana Carvey's Grumpy Old Man, we liked it that way. The fun of *Zork* was comparable to the pleasure of a good novel. You could envision the scene, personalize it, make it your own. And even better than a novel, you could interact with the scenes and everything in them. You had a real cause and effect power over a fictional world. "Get Knife. Attack Grue."

Now, thanks to the talented folks at **Activision**, we'll get to once again explore the Great Underground Empire of Zork. The brand new *Return to Zork* not only revives a classic adventure cycle, but catapults it from the text-only beginnings of adventure gaming into the future of interactive entertainment. Best of all, *RTZ* has made the amazing leap from past to future with the grace, humor, and fully realized game world we've come to expect of the name Zork.

Eddie Dombrower, the producer of *Return to Zork*, says that the goal from the very beginning of the project (over a year and a half ago!) was not simply to create a new *Zork* game, or even to make a modern-style graphic adventure set in the Zork universe. The designers hoped to actually advance the state of computer gaming, from the way players interact with the game environment to the graphics and sounds which bring that environment to life. And they wanted it to be fun. "We're adventure game players," Dombrower said of the *RTZ* design team. "As a rule, you always try to build a game that *you'd* want to play."

The first step was to create a unique interface that, although *entirely* graphical, allowed the creative freedom of the text parser while avoiding some of the problems in existing graphical interfaces. Many graphical interfaces, Dombrower explains, actually make the game too easy. "You don't really have to interact with a scene. You just have to discover what's in it."

A typical adventure game,

for instance, might have you sweep your cursor about the screen, and the cursor would turn into a hand icon indicating you'd found a sword you can pick up. You might then click the sword on a bad guy to attack him. But in *RTZ*, you have to decide *how* you'll pick it up. Will you hold it, or transfer it immediately into your inventory? And when you use the sword on an enemy, you're presented with a number of different *ways* to use it. Will you slash from the left or right, thrust forward, strike the enemy with the blade, or swing down at his head?

The *RTZ* system quickly becomes second-nature, even though it presents you with more choices and a greater degree of control over the objects in your inventory than other types of interfaces. You'll forget there's anything extraordinary about it — and that's the true beauty of its design.

But it's the look of *Return to Zork*, and the sheer professionalism of its presentation, that will command your admiration each time you sit down to play. Utilizing digitized video and audio of professional actors in nearly every role, *RTZ* comes closer to being an interactive movie than any game we've seen.

Of course you're thinking, "Yeah, sure, I've heard *that* before." But in truth, *no game so far* has really deserved the appellation. While there have been plenty of beautiful cinematic sequences within games, these aren't interactive. And though digitized characters have also been used in games, they're usually framed with icon bars and inventories, in effect functioning as game pieces. The experience is similar to reaching into a box and manipulating dolls — including a pre-designed little doll of the character you're playing.

Return to Zork is different. From start to finish, your viewpoint is the only one that's important. You, the player, are the character moving through the game, and you see every building, object, and person from a first-person perspective. There are no framing icons, no borders around the screen to remind you that you're looking into a computer monitor. You are the star of *RTZ*, and you'll live this game through *your* eyes and *your* ears.

Ears, because not a single written line of dialog appears in this game. When you talk with anyone, or when you're told important information, it's entirely through digitized speech. If you don't have a sound card, you'll need one! To help you remember what's been said, you can access a tape recorder in your inventory that automatically records all dialog. It's a wonderful extension of the first-person perspective, and it works beautifully.

Dombrower explains that a lot of thought went into the decision to use a first-person view. "One of the reasons we made this a first person game is that text games are first-person. They don't describe your character as a rule," Dombrower says. "You aren't a hero, unlike third-person point-of-view games where you see your character, and there's a gender, race, status associated with the person you're playing as."

While the feeling of playing *Return to Zork* as yourself will be a familiar one to *Zork* veterans, the setting of the game won't. *RTZ* is set 700 years after the last text adventure, so the world has changed quite a bit.

This break with the familiar was intentional. Because fans of the text adventures are used to painting the world of Zork in their own minds, the Activision team knew that no visual representation of that world could satisfy everyone. "I didn't want to try to bring something from people's minds to the screen," Dombrower explained. "These fans are a very, very loyal group, and trying to draw things they've imagined for years didn't seem appropriate."

In fact, Dombrower compares the process of bringing the world of Zork into visual terms to translating a popular novel to the movie screen: no matter how you work it, someone's bound to be disappointed. But the Activision team seems to have conquered this problem, first by placing the new game far in the future, and most importantly by using professional actors, directors, and screenwriters to propel *Return to Zork* into a new level of computer entertainment.

Dombrower and the *RTZ* development team are among the first computer game designers to realize that once computer games move into the realm of acting, dialog, and photo-realism, they are no longer competing against other computer games. They are going head-to-head with television and movies.

When we see live human actors in a game, it's only natural to expect acting on a par with at least what you'd see in an average TV sitcom. But when you're presented with stiff, unbelievable, and amateurish performances like those throughout *The Seventh Guest*, the bad acting quickly overwhelms the technological achievement of bringing live action to the computer. It becomes all too easy to say "If I want to see acting, I'll watch TV. If I want to play a computer game, I'll play one *without* these hambone performances!"

But when instead we see and hear acting of the high caliber presented in *Return to Zork* we're able to throw ourselves into the experience and truly feel that we're playing an interactive movie rather than an interactive high school play. Because the production values are so high in *RTZ*, you'll find yourself drawn into the game's storyline immediately, never having to overlook flawed performances.

Until now, the much-heralded "marriage" of Hollywood and computer entertainment has seemed to be just so much hype. But *Return to Zork* actually brings the hype to life. This is truly an amazing, next-generation product, of such unparalleled quality and technical excellence that it *must* become the model for all tomorrow's designers.

Zork is back, to lead us into the future. Again.

Courtesy National Air & Space Museum

WHERE EAGLES DARE

DYNAMIX TAKES AERIAL COMBAT TO NEW HEIGHTS WITH *ACES OVER EUROPE*

STEPHEN POOLE

There's something about the aircraft that fought in the skies above Europe during World War II that fires the imagination of any airplane enthusiast. The sleek, aerodynamic design of the P-51, the sharklike fuselage of the Me-262, the graceful curves of the Supermarine Spitfire, the incredible durability of the B-17 Flying Fortress — these and other classic designs left behind a legacy unparalleled in the history of aerial combat.

Dogfighting buffs continue to marvel at these aircraft, planes that went from the drawing board to the runway in almost record time, yet which delivered nearly everything their designers promised. But why is there so much interest after all these years, when the entire concept of air power has undergone such a radical rethinking as to make the tactics of World War II seem almost trite?

Perhaps it's because World War II — particularly in the European Theater — was the highwater mark of dogfighting, a technique rendered almost useless in this age of stealth technology and fire-and-forget weapons. It was a time when a pilot's skill, rather than the computer technology at his fingertips, was the only thing that stood between him and a fiery death.

In spite of the unquestionable horror of all warfare, there's something romantic about the concept of man and machine becoming one in an acrobatic dance of death — twisting, turning, firing, diving, looping, and rolling in a deadly aerial ballet. Though nearly every encounter ended with a fatality, there seemed to be an interpersonal dynamic between adversaries that was lacking in other types of combat. The plane, tactics, and even the luck of an opponent must have burned each encounter into a fighter pilot's mind as surely as if it had been his last — and made him aware, if only for a few moments, of the individuality of his foe.

HAVE YOUR CAKE AND EAT IT TOO — ALMOST

This is the world of *Aces Over Europe*, the third installment in **Dynamix**'s Great War Planes series. Other WWII air-combat simulations have been set in the European theatre — *Their Finest Hour: Battle of Britain* and *Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe* from LucasArts, and *Chuck Yeager's Air Combat* from Electronic Arts, to name three outstanding examples — but for me, none brings the action to vivid life the way *Aces Over Europe* does.

Aces of the Pacific, Dynamix's predecessor to *Aces Over Europe*, has earned a sacred spot on the hard drives of many a PC fighter pilot. Nearly every flight-sim junkie I talk to loves *AOTP*, despite the fact that its flight model is somewhat forgiving even with all realism toggles on. But as good as *AOTP* is, *Aces Over Europe* is even better, thanks largely to the scores of enhancements and new features that Dynamix has incorporated in the game.

The most obvious change is in graphics. While *AOTP* had decent graphics, there was little or no use of shading or texturing, making the planes appear rather flat. In *Aces Over Europe*, however, nothing could be further from the truth. Gradient shading has been added to all aircraft exteriors, making for a much more realistic look. Each squadron — whether it belongs to the USAAF, RAF, or Luftwaffe — comes with its own historically accurate colorings. And when your shots find their mark against an enemy aircraft, you now see the flash of lead hitting metal, a realistic and invaluable aid in making the most of your ammo.

But the graphic change likely to cause the biggest buzz is the simulation's Tall Res mode, which switches the resolution from 320 x 200 to 320 x 400. The result? Some of the best looking aircraft you've ever seen on a PC. Greatly reduced are the jagged, "stairstepped" edges on wings and fuselages; in their place you'll find the

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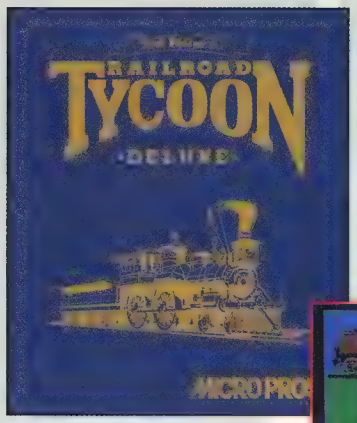

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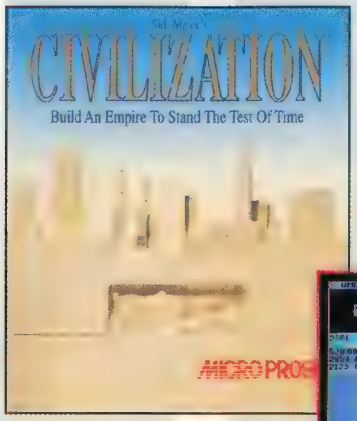

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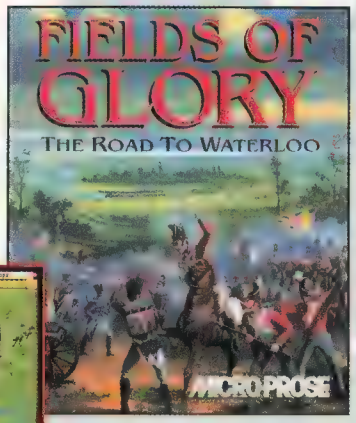

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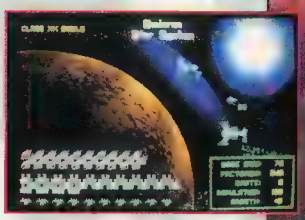

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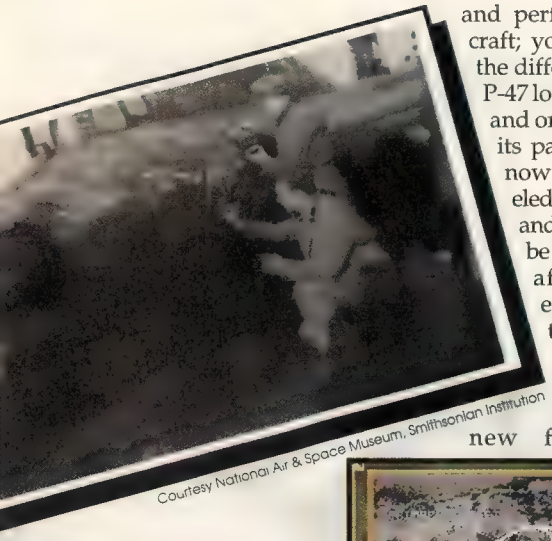
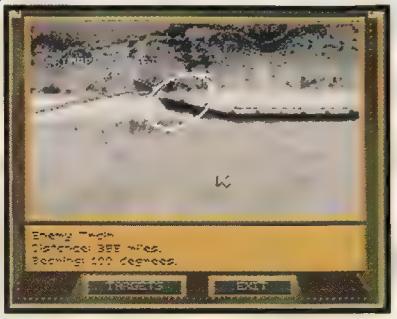


Courtesy National Air & Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution

and performance of aircraft; you can really tell the difference between a P-47 loaded with bombs and one that's dropped its payload. Spins are now accurately modeled for all the aircraft, and will undoubtedly be the cause of many a fiery crash for players unaccustomed to such realism.

And just what planes are affected by these new flight models?



smoothest lines seen on a sim this depth and playable.

There is, however, a price to pay for graphics with this level of definition: Dynamix tells us that playing in Tall Res will knock the frame rate down about 15 percent. Nearly everyone agreed that *Aces of the Pacific* required a 486/33 to really soar; if the preview version (85 percent complete) of *Aces Over Europe* I've been playing is an indication, it's a safe bet that you'll need a 486/50 to achieve a truly satisfactory frame rate in Tall Res mode. Even in standard VGA mode, though, the planes are a marked improvement over *AOTP*.

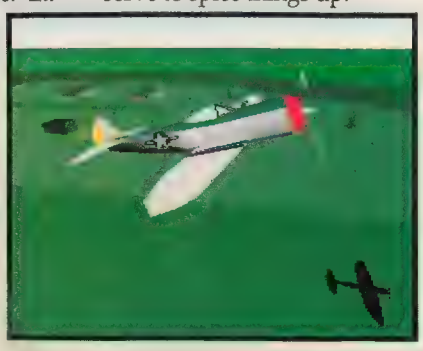
Of course, looks aren't everything, especially for air-combat fans, so Dynamix didn't limit changes to the graphics department. The flight models are greatly enhanced in *Aces over Europe*, addressing several of the issues for which the hardcore flight-sim crowd took Dynamix to task. Stalls are much more frequent—and more dangerous — than in *AOTP*, and players accustomed to flinging themselves about the sky in mind-boggling maneuvers are in for a healthy reality check. Mass affects both the top speed

American planes you can fly are limited to three fighters, the P-38, the P-47, and the P-51; American bombers you protect or attack are the B-17 Flying Fortress, B-24 Liberator, and the B-26 Marauder. British mounts include the Hawker Tempest and Typhoon, two types of Spitfire (the Mk. IX and XIV), and the DeHaviland Mosquito, a fighter-bomber that combined impressive speed with awesome firepower; the only RAF bomber here is the B-25 Mitchell. For the Luftwaffe, you can fly two types of the ubiquitous Bf-109 (of course), three types of Focke-Wulf 190s, and two especially historic aircraft: the Me-262 and the Arado 234B, respectively the first jet fighter and bomber to see combat. The other German plan you'll see is the Junkers 88 bombers, an extremely fast light-bomber which was sometimes equipped with nitrous oxide injection that gave it a top speed close to 400 mph.

JUST LIKE COMING HOME

The physics may have changed and the looks may be superior, but anyone who's played *Red Baron* or *Aces of the Pacific* will feel like they've come home with *Aces Over Europe*. The Main menu presents all the options that made those earlier titles such a joy to explore. From it, you can choose to fly a single mission, start a career for any of the three combatants, view any of the vehicles you'll fly in or against (including ships and tanks), set realism levels and flight-control options, and access a VCR function that's one of the best in the business — if you have the time and inclination, you could easily create a short war movie with this baby.

The titles for all the Single Missions are self-explanatory: Historic Missions, Dogfight a Famous Ace, Fighter Sweep, Scramble (improved over *AOTP* in that enemies are attacking as you taxi down the runway), Training (which allows you to practice aerial gunnery, ground and shipping attacks, and landing), Escort Bombers, Intercept Bombers, Anti-Shipping Strike, Close Support, Interdiction (which offers missions suspiciously similar to ones you fly in Close Support), and Crossbow (attacks on V-1 launch sites). Ground attacks are much more difficult than the ones in *Aces of the Pacific* due to increased AA fire, and new targets such as tanks, jeeps, and bunkers also serve to spice things up.



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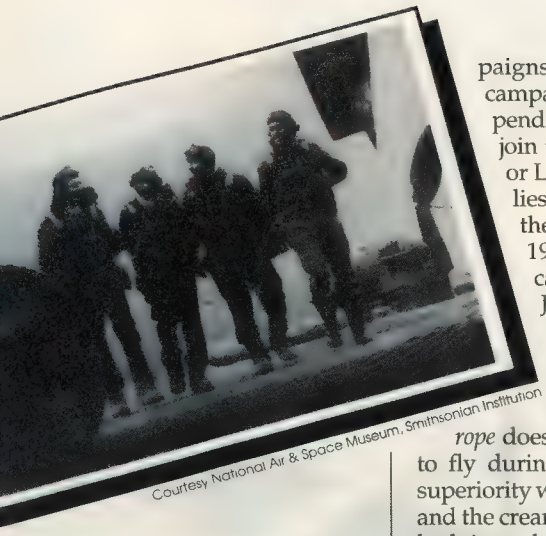
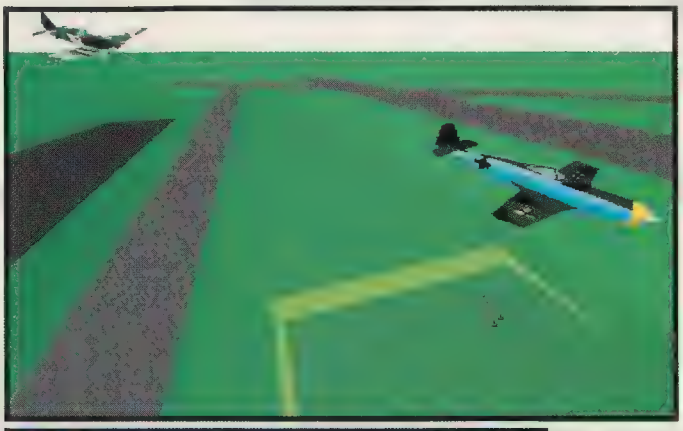
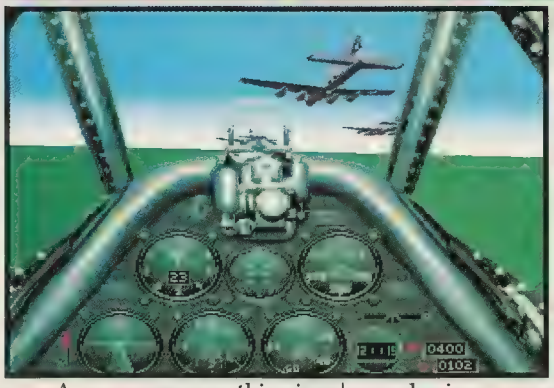


Courtesy National Air & Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution

paigns; the number of campaigns available depends on whether you join the USAAF, RAF, or Luftwaffe. The earliest you can take to the skies is 1 April 1944, and the last campaign begins 31 January 1945.

Players may be initially disappointed to find that *Aces Over Europe* doesn't offer a chance to fly during 1943, when air superiority was still undecided and the cream of the Luftwaffe hadn't yet been decimated either on the Eastern front or in

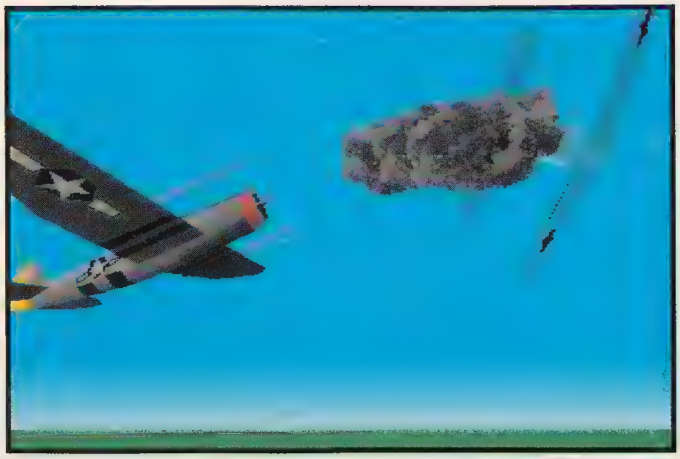




attempts to halt U.S. daylight bombing raids. But by beginning the simulation in April 1944, Dynamix has been able to place plenty of emphasis on ground attacks against targets of opportunity — tanks, bridges, airbases, and so forth — that weren't available until long-range escorts

As you can see, this sim presents an incredible variety of missions. But the fun doesn't end there. Except for Historic Missions, you have almost total control over every aspect of the mission — number and type of planes for both sides, the skill levels of all pilots (you can select specific aces for both sides in dogfighting missions), armament, ordnance, the altitude at which aerial engagements begin, and the type of weather you'll encounter.

You can choose to begin a career with one of several cam-



entered service in large numbers. And an incredible amount of aerial combat took place during the last year of the war as the Luftwaffe made increasingly desperate attempts to stem the tide of battle, so there's no shortage of white-knuckled action.

In fact, it sometimes seems that if you're flying for the USAAF or RAF, the opposition is a little *too* stiff and a little *too* numerous. By November of 1944, the Luftwaffe consisted mainly of novice pilots with no combat experience under their belts, and Allied air patrols frequently ranged unopposed over the continent. Yet in American or British Career mode, almost all sorties — even those in January of 1945 — are marked by encounters against enemies who seem to have been honing their skills during the entire war. Then again, maybe the problem isn't so much a case of the German AI routines being artificially strong as it is my dogfighting skills not ranking with those of Gabreski or Zemke.

THE MARK OF QUALITY

I could go on and on about the other enhancements Dynamix has introduced in *Aces Over Europe*, but there's a simpler and easier way to get that point across: If you like dogfighting and have enough computing horsepower, buy *Aces Over Europe*. Everything about this product is first-rate, from the wonderfully illustrated 200-plus page manual to the plethora of Realism options that make *Aces Over Europe* accessible to even the greenest of pilots. With *Aces Over Europe*, Dynamix is no longer just the name of a software developer; it's a mark of quality.

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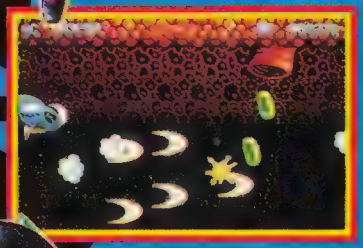

Sent down to earth on a mission of discovery, our pint sized hero suddenly finds himself in a world full of danger (well he would wouldn't he!)

Can Zool do whatever he was sent down to earth to do, or will he end up just another ex-ninja from the "*Nth*" dimension? Miss this game, and you've missed "IT"

Screen shots from various formats. Packaging designed & produced by The Camel Group Sheffield.

Features: • Seven huge superb levels. • Sizzling sonix?!! • Incredible gameplay. • Full screen parallax scrolling.

" Gremlin have produced a masterpiece." ***Amiga Action 96%.***

" Fast, action-packed, challenging and highly addictive." ***The Sun.***

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Pushing The Envelope:

THE 1993 SUMMER CONSUMER ELECTRONICS SHOW

The Summer Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago is always an exciting affair for all of us at PC Entertainment. Many publishers save their best products for the Christmas buying season, and Summer CES is where we get our first glimpse at what we can look forward to between August and January.

Still, it came as something of a shock to see just how many high-quality games are being readied for release. If the number of upcoming titles is any indication, the entertainment software industry as a whole feels confident that gamers are ready to lay down the bucks for new games that incorporate the latest advances in computer technology.

There's a ton of new titles coming down the pike, and our CES roundup will help you get a grip on what to expect from whom. And as always, you can count on in-depth reviews of many of these products as soon as they become available. Let's get started!

Accolade: Accolade plans to concentrate in the areas for which it's become famous — sports and driving simulations — with four upcoming titles, all featuring celebrity endorsements and/or hot licenses. *Speed Racer in The Challenge of Racer X* (September) will be the first to reach store shelves. Based on the famous cartoon series, the game puts the player in the role of either Speed Racer or Racer X, driving on six courses against a variety of opponents.

Mike Ditka Ultimate Football II, which will feature Super VGA graphics and play-by-play commentary by award-winning sportscaster Al Michaels, is slated for a fourth-quarter release. Accolade also announced an exclusive, worldwide licensing agreement with Charles Barkley to co-design and endorse the company's line of basketball games for IBM PC, Super Nintendo, and Sega Genesis; the currently untitled PC game will ship during the first quarter of 1994.

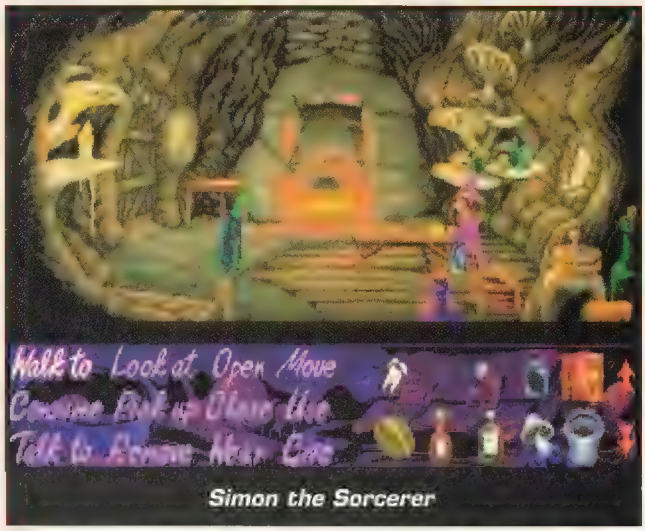
Speed Racer

For *Brett Hull Hockey* (second quarter), Accolade signed a multi-year licensing agreement with the National Hockey League Player's Association to use the names, likenesses, and statistics of real NHL players. Like *Ditka II*, *Brett Hull Hockey* will feature Al Michaels' play-by-play commentary.

Activision: Veteran gamers who fondly remember the best-selling text-based Zork adventures will be happy to hear that *Return to Zork*, a multimedia adventure, should be available in late September (see our cover story elsewhere in this issue). *Mechwarrior II — The Clans* (fall), based on FASA's Battletech universe, is essentially the PC version of the BattleTech VR centers. *Mechwarrior II* features both one- and two-player modes; in the latter you can go head-to-head against a human opponent or play as teammates (network play with multiple opponents is still being contemplated). The game supports Thrustmaster products, and when played with the Thrustmaster stick, throttle, and rudder pedals, the degree of control is outstanding.

Mechwarrior II — The Clans

Announced but not on display were *Alien vs. Predator* and *Simon the Sorcerer*. *Alien vs. Predator* lets the gamer play as either of the title characters or as a human base commander, with the choice determining the type of game (graphic adventure as a

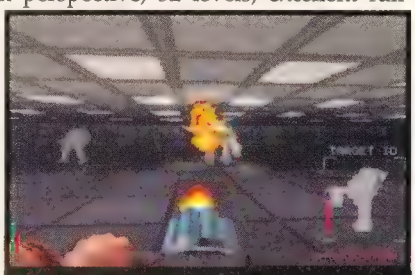


Simon the Sorcerer

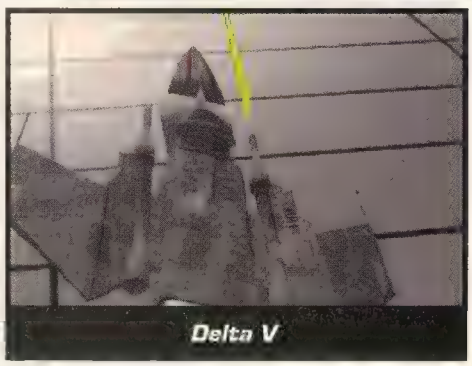
human, arcade action as the Predator, and simulation as the Alien.) *Simon the Sorcerer* is an animated graphic fantasy adventure with over 100 game screens and an interface reminiscent of system developed by LucasArts' for its adventures..

Aris Entertainment: *VideoCube: Space* is basically a computerized Rubik's Cube, incorporating 126 *Microsoft Video for Windows* videos and CD-quality musical sound effects. Each puzzle begins with an animated cube containing dozens of video fragments, and the player must unscramble the stills on each side of the cube. When the puzzle is solved, the complete video — ranging in length from a few seconds to nearly a minute — is played. The video sequences are from NASA, and include footage of rocket launches, moon walks, and other astronomical themes.

Bethesda Softworks: This Maryland-based publisher had one of the busiest booths at the show, thanks in large part to *The Terminator: Rampage* (October). The sequel to last year's best-selling *Terminator 2029* is a smoothly scrolling shooter that features a first-person perspective, 32 levels, excellent full-screen graphics, great sound effects, and joystick support (an option not found in *Terminator 2029*).


The Terminator: Rampage

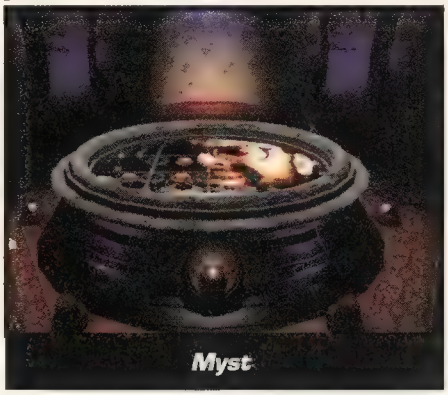
Action fans will also be interested in *Delta V* (October), an arcade-shooter with a virtual reality setting. The 3-D graphics are very impressive, and the animation is so smooth that Bethesda had to post a notice that the game was running on a computer, not a VCR. And up to six players can compete with the modem-play option.


Delta V

The Elder Scrolls, Chapter 1: The Arena (October) is Bethesda's debut in fantasy role-playing. The game features a smoothly scrolling first-person perspective, an innovative spellcasting system, over 2500 magic items, and over 400 towns and villages. Subsequent chapters are planned for the series.

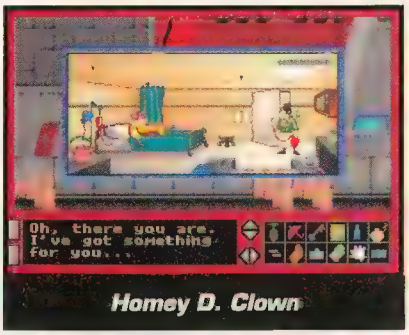
Bethesda was also showing two sports titles. *Gretzky Gold: The Collector's Edition* (available only from August to February) is a bundled package that includes *Wayne Gretzky 3, Hockey Simulator 2*, and a photo of Wayne Gretzky. *NCAA Basketball: Road to the Final Four 2* (September) is a marked improvement over the original *Road to the Final Four*, with enhanced graphics, player intelligence based on actual NCAA statistics, a stats editor, arcade and coach-only modes, and several tourney modes.

Broderbund: *Myst* (Winter) is a CD-ROM graphic adventure with over *2000* screens of some of the most stunningly rendered SVGA artwork we've seen. Created by Rand and Robyn Miller (*Cosmic Osmo, the Manhole*), *Myst* is a world in which books can physically transport people to fantastic alternate universes. But someone has used this power to evil ends, and you must solve puzzles and uncover clues in order to restore the land to its natural order. Also from Rand and Robyn Miller comes *Spelunx and the Caves of Mr. Pseudo* (now available). Aimed at kids ages 5 to 12, the game allows children to explore a light-hearted fantasy world of games and amazing inventions covering topics such as biology, astronomy, physics, and music.


Myst

Two new titles were announced in Broderbund's acclaimed Living Book series (*Just Grandma and Me, Arthur's Teacher Troubles*). *The New Kid on the Block* (fall), based on the works of children's poet Jack Prelutsky, is the first book of interactive poetry in the series. The game features 18 poems that are read aloud and fully animated, and will include a book of Prelutsky's poems. *The Tortoise and the Hare* (fall 1993) is a colorful retelling of the classic Aesop's fable, and includes dozens of animations, excellent voice-overs, and fantastic sounds and music.

Capstone: This publisher is known for acquiring licenses based on hit movies and TV shows, as one look at its current lineup will attest. *Surf Ninjas* (August) is an action game based on the New Line Cinema movie starring Leslie Nielsen being released this August; *Homey D. Clown* (September) is a zany action adventure game starring the popular character from Fox TV's "In Living Color" series; and *The Beverly Hillbillies* (September) is a graphic adventure in which you guide the Clampett clan from their mountain home to Beverly Hills.



Homey D. Clown

The Beverly Hillbillies

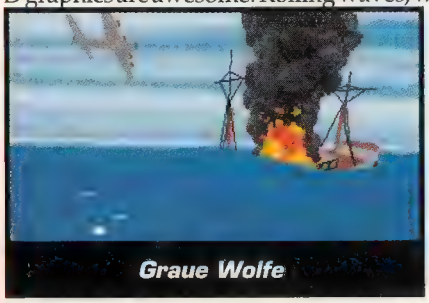
Capstone also previewed *Discoveries of the Deep* (September). The early version we saw looked intriguing — the player takes control of a submersible on seven different undersea missions.

Part education and part adventure, *Discoveries of the Deep* is a unique product for Capstone.

D.C. True: The company that brought you *Shadow President* is now applying its computer game know-how to a higher pursuit: educating children. Slated for a fall release, *Electric Reading Land* heads up a new line of learning products from D.C. True. The program employs state-of-the-art graphics and sound to introduce youngsters ages 4 to 7 to the world of the written word. What's more, D.C. True plans to donate five percent of all royalties from the title to Software for Success, a non-profit organization dedicated to helping disadvantaged children.

Deadly Games: Although hardly a household name, Deadly Games is beginning to acquire a cult following for its series of unassuming but addictive war games. To date, its products have been limited to the Mac platform, but the company plans to make the plunge into the PC market this fall. Both *Battle of Britain* and *M4* have been earmarked for conversion, to be joined before year's end by a new simulation entitled *U-Boat*.

Dynamix: Two of the big titles Dynamix was showing — *Betrayal at Krondor* and *Aces Over Europe* — are covered in-depth elsewhere in this issue. Both are very impressive, but *Graue Wolfe* (September), a WWII German U-Boat simulation, may have been one of the most pleasant surprises of the show. The 3-D graphics are awesome: Rolling waves, whitecaps, clouds, fog, and various weather effects are all displayed with a high degree of realism. The sim will have the same engine — with options for Training, Single Mission, and Campaign modes, and a variety of realism toggles — as found in the highly successful *Red Baron*, *Aces of the Pacific*, and *Aces Over Europe*. There's even digitized German speech to add to the *gestalt*.


Graue Wolfe

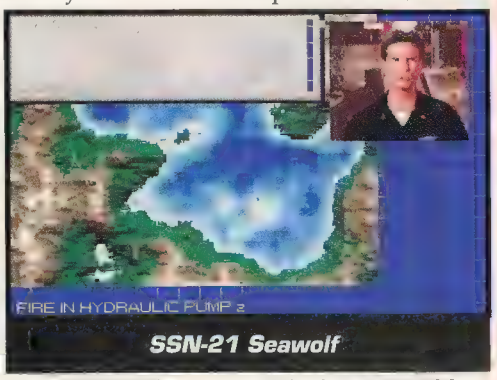
The sequel to *The Incredible Machine*, aptly named *The Even More Incredible Machine* (August), adds 73 new puzzles and 11 new parts to that award-winning game, as well as a puzzle builder that lets you trade puzzles of your own design with friends. *Incredible Toons* (September) is based on the same idea as *The Incredible Machine*, but incorporates animated cartoon characters as well as tools for solving puzzles. *Front Page Sports: Football Pro* is the enhanced version of the game we voted Best Sports Game of 1992. New features include real NFL player names and stats, greatly improved artificial intelligence, printing capabilities, and expanded coaching and play-calling options.

Incredible Toons

Front Page Sports: Football Pro

Dynamix hopes to take advantage of the popularity of Windows with *Take a Break! Pinball*. The package includes eight pinball tables based on characters from five Sierra/Dynamix games, with animated artwork for each table and thorough (and sometimes funny) on-line help.

Electronic Arts: *SSN-21 Sea Wolf* (October) is the sequel to *688 Attack Sub*. It's a simulation of the in-design SSN-21 Seawolf Attack sub, which the U.S. Navy says will be the fastest, deepest-diving, most heavily armed U.S. sub put to sea. (See the "GameBytes" section in this issue.)



SSN-21 Seawolf

Seal Team should be available by the time this issue reaches newsstands. It's a squad-level simulation set during the Vietnam conflict, with the player assuming the role of point man. The four tours of duty cover 80 historical missions based on actual combat reports. The game's polygon graphics appear a little dated, but fluid animation and multiple views help bring the action to life.

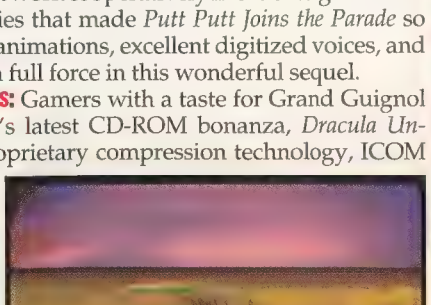
Kasparov's Gambit (Christmas 1993) has one of the best chess tutorials we've seen in a PC-based product. It also plays an incredibly strong game of chess thanks to its new chess algorithm, Socrates II, which won the 1993 International Computer Chess Championship. SVGA graphics and digitized footage of World Champion Garry Kasparov round out a great chess title.

The Labyrinth

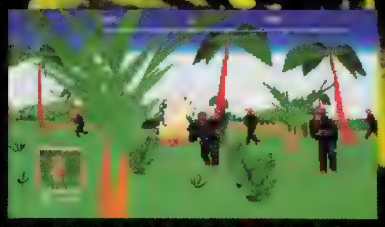
The Labyrinth (fall 1993), EA's first CD-ROM title, is a fantasy adventure based around a series of graphic and logic puzzles. The Labyrinth bridges both space and time, so puzzles in one era will affect game play in other time periods. The SVGA 3D-modeled and rendered graphics are sharp, and the interface is clean and intuitive — adventure fans will want to keep an eye out for this one.

Humongous: *Putt Putt Goes to the Moon* (fall) sends everyone's favorite talking car to Luna, where he meets Rover (as in Lunar Rover). The two must work cooperatively in order to get back to Earth. All the qualities that made *Putt Putt Joins the Parade* so endearing — clever animations, excellent digitized voices, and fun puzzles — are in full force in this wonderful sequel.

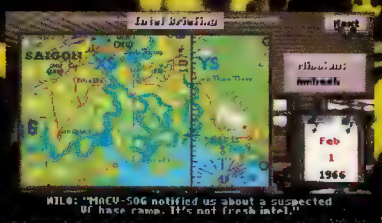
ICOM Simulations: Gamers with a taste for Grand Guignol will feast on ICOM's latest CD-ROM bonanza, *Dracula Unleashed*. Using its proprietary compression technology, ICOM has stuffed the game with 96 minutes of color motion video and 50 minutes of audio. Replay value is high, as many scenes will play out in different ways depending on what has transpired. The adventure picks up about ten years after the Bram Stoker


Global Golf

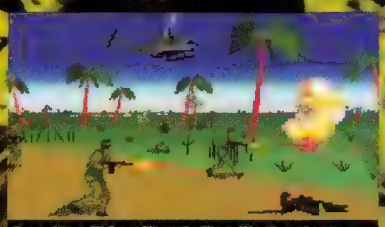
ON THE FIELD OF FIRE



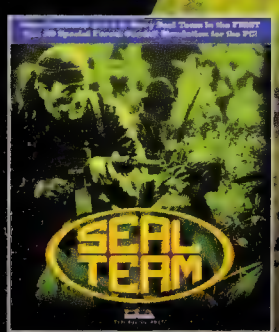
The First Realistic 3-D Battlefield. Run from hut to hut, or hit the dirt and take cover behind trees and rocks.



Unmatched Depth and Authenticity
80 historical missions based on actual combat reports provided by the UDT-SEAL Museum Association Inc.



Leading Edge Simulation Technology
See tracers and explosions through your own eyes or seven external views. Hear real digitized battle sounds.



You and your team jump out of a Huey and belly through 200 yards of mud and darkness toward the village. You signal your team to fan out and take out the guard posts, but your flanker goes down—booby trap! Suddenly rounds from an AK-47 shriek overhead and the night is ablaze with tracers and the shock waves of mortar fire.

Welcome to "Forest of Assassins", Vietnam's Mekong Delta. Your worst nightmare come true. Available for IBM® and compatibles.

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Product Information Number 140

novel left off, with the dreaded count once more stalking the streets of London.

Along somewhat different lines, computer golfers will now be able to enjoy the benefits of CD-ROM technology in *Global Golf*, ICOM's first foray into the sporting field. The game has a whimsical edge, as it allows players to compete on imaginary courses in such unlikely locales as Antarctica, Siberia, and Iran. But if its premise seems a bit fanciful, its graphics promise to deliver the ultimate in photo-realism with a 3-D modeling system that supplies 200 pre-rendered "real" images per hole.

I-Motion: *Alone in the Dark 2* (fall), the follow-up to I-Motion's critically acclaimed debut title, features more monsters, more weapons, and more story. *Shadow of the Comet* (currently available) is a CD-ROM graphic adventure inspired by the novels of H.P. Lovecraft. The artwork here isn't as striking as *Alone in the Dark*, but the game world is very big. I-Motion had only a brief demo of the CD-ROM game *L for Liberty* (fall), but it looked *hot*. An arcade-style shooter that puts the player in a futuristic aircraft, the animation and graphics in *L for Liberty* were as good as many of the works in progress for 3DO.

Impressions: First in line for release are new versions of a couple of older titles: *Rules of Engagement II* (currently available), Omnitrend's real-time, strategic space combat game, and *Cohorts II*, a miniatures-based simulation of ancient warfare designed to link up with *Caesar*. *Empire* fans who crave a larger arena of battle may want to take a look at *When Two Worlds War*. As the title suggests, this is a game of conflict and conquest on an interplanetary scale. The program supports modem play and also recognizes voice commands for owners of the Aria Soundcard.

Impressions was also showing *Edward Grabowski's The Blue & The Gray*, due out by the end of August. The game presents a grand strategic panorama of the entire Civil War while also including the ability to resolve individual battles on a tactical map using Impression's patented micro-miniatures system. Impressions intends to supplement the game with a series of add-on data disks, allowing players to refight historical engagements such as Gettysburg and Shiloh.

Other games in the works from Impressions include *Global Domination*, *Breach 3*, and *Detroit* (November). The last title might best be described as *Air Bucks* set in the auto industry: In the tradition of Henry Ford, players can invest in new technologies and experiment with different car designs, all in the hopes of steering their car company to financial success.

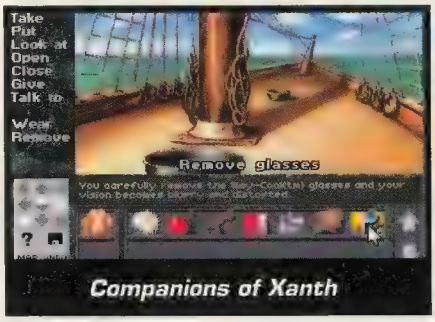
Interplay: *Start Trek: 25th Anniversary* was intended as the first installment in a series of games based on the '60's TV show, and now Interplay has announced *Star Trek: Judgment Rites* (third quarter). Like the first game, *Judgment Rites* is an episode-based adventure, with each episode (eight in all) consisting of a specific mission requiring the player to solve puzzles and problems in order to move on to the next level.

Stonekeep (fourth quarter) was announced to much hoopla at Winter CES, and from what we saw this time out the game seems to be coming along nicely. This FRP features a smoothly scrolling first-person perspective, as well as pop-up menus and a simple interface. The full-screen graphics do an excellent job of immersing the player in the experience, and the graphics are as good as any we've seen in this type of game (with the exception of our brief glimpse at Twin Dolphins' *Forgotten Castle: The Awakening*). Film footage and blue-screen cinematography have been incorporated to make the animated monsters very lifelike. Interplay also announced that it had just picked up *Dungeon Master II*, but no release date was announced.

Interplay is also aiming to enter the CD-ROM market in a big way. *Sim City* is scheduled for conversion to CD-ROM in the third quarter of. The enhanced version features CD stereo sound and music, and digitized video for newscasts, disasters, and other events (30 minutes total). Interplay also announced plans to bring *Sim Ant* and *Sim Life* to CD-ROM in the third and fourth quarters, respectively. The CD-ROM version of *Star Trek: 25th Anniversary* (third quarter) has the same episodes as the floppy-based original, but adds the actual voices of William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy, and DeForest Kelly, along with the musical score and sound effects from the TV series.

Koei: While companies like Impressions are gearing up their production of PC titles, Koei is scaling back. The somewhat lukewarm response to its recent releases has prompted Koei to reevaluate its commitment to the PC market. Consequently, the PC version of *P.T.O.: Pacific Theater of Operations* has been placed on the backburner. However, all of the news from Koei wasn't blue. The company announced *Romance of the Three Kingdoms III* (November) and *Genghis Khan II: Clan of the Grey Wolf* (January). Both will feature VGA graphics — a Koei first — and other enhancements.

Legend: Literary tie-ins continue apace at Legend. *Gateway II: Homeworld*, the sequel to *Frederick Pohl's Gateway*, should be available now. Joining it in October will be *Companions of Xanth*, based on the series of best-selling fantasy novels by Piers Anthony. Xanth was designed to remain true to the spirit of the books, meaning players are in for some truly pun-filled times as they match wits with the evil Com-Pewter and other baddies. The game also introduces a spanking new interface that preserves the rich, interactive quality of Legend adventures, while being faster, easier, and more intuitive to use. As an extra bonus, the program comes packaged with a paperback edition of Anthony's latest opus, *Demons Don't Dream*.



Companions of Xanth

LucasArts: Heading up LucasArts' new batch of games are floppy-disk and CD-ROM versions of *Day of the Tentacle: Maniac Mansion 2*, reviewed in this issue. *Sam and Max Hit the Road* (fall) is a graphic adventure based on the popular comic book series that follows two "freelance" police partners — Sam (a dog) and Max (a rabbit). As with *Day of the Tentacle*, the animation is fantastic, and from the demo we saw it looked as though LucasArts has managed to retain the adult humor of the comic book.

Tie Fighter

Rebel Assault (fall) is LucasArts first CD-only game — it will be released for PC CD-ROM, Sega CD, and CD-I. It looks fantastic, and our video-game editors tell us that the Sega CD version plays great. Hardcore flight fans may be dismayed by the changing perspective (inside cockpit, behind the ship, switching to a skimmer for ground attacks, etc.), but the bitmapped and

Sam and Max

SHADOWCASTER™

The Power to Change

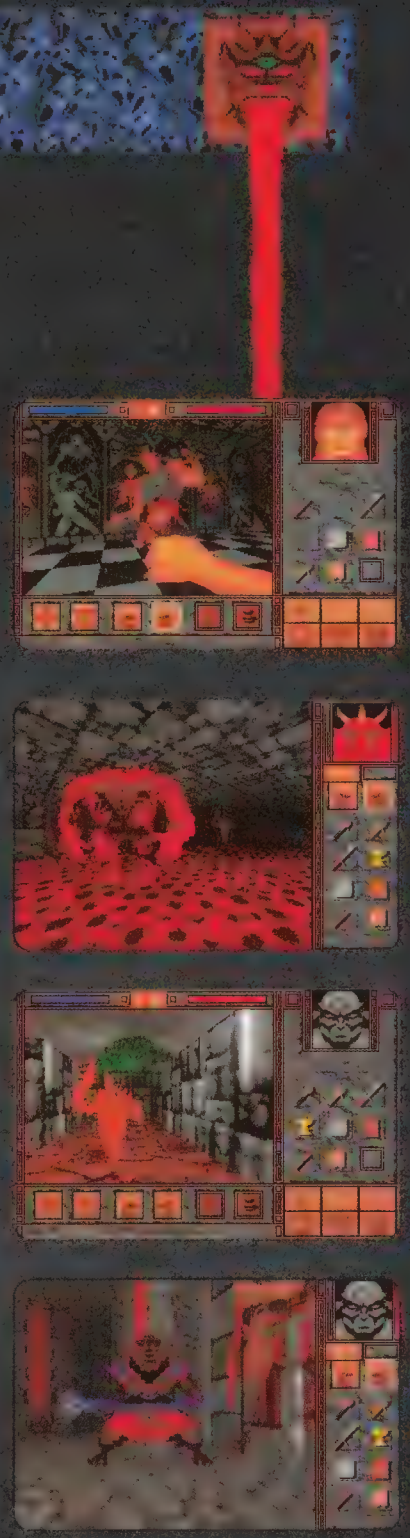
Metamorphosis is the Shadowcaster's Strength… And his Achilles' Heel.

As the Shadowcaster, you take on many forms in the battle for survival. You're the resourceful human adventurer, the fierce, six-limbed cat, the versatile, flying dragon and others.

But change comes at a price. In one form, you're quick and agile, but small and fragile. In another, you're a nearly indestructible giant, but ponderous and slow. You alter shapes at will – and each form unleashes new powers and reveals new vulnerabilities.

The pace never falters in *Shadowcaster*, the unique new point-of-view action adventure from ORIGIN. You race through corridors lined with pulsing lights, and into chambers covered with sculpted faces in this smooth-scrolling, fun-filled odyssey.

You discover magic, but you won't need to mix reagents or memorize spells. You weave your way through dungeons, caverns, castles and caves, but you won't have time to linger – the powerful and wicked lurk at every turn, just waiting for the chance to draw first blood. In the final battle, you challenge a being with powers that match (or surpass!) your own — and the irresistable force meets the immovable object.



Actual screens may vary.

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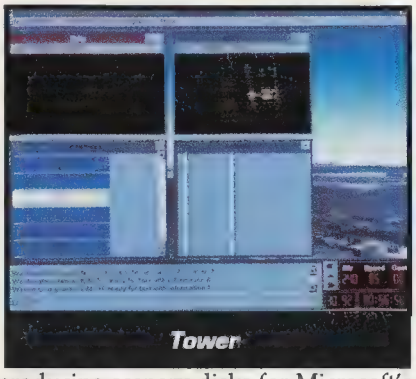
Product Information Number 102

Gouraud-shaded graphics are awesome, and the variety of locales keeps things interesting. In a similar vein is *TIE Fighter* (winter), the working title for the sequel to *X-Wing*. LucasArts wasn't previewing the game, but if the response to *X-Wing* is any indication, *TIE Fighter* could be another big hit.

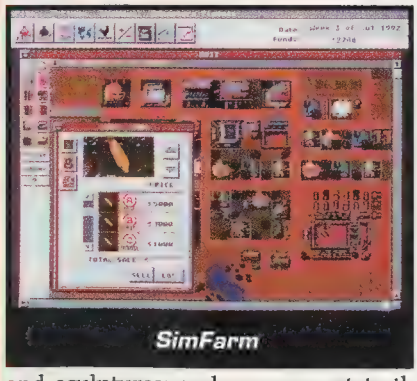
Steven Spielberg says it would cost too much money to bring his latest brainchild to the silver screen, so he teamed up with *Loom* designer Brian Moriarty to produce *The Dig* (winter). In this sci-fi adventure, a team of astronauts lands on an asteroid that's on a collision course with Earth — only to discover the "asteroid" is an alien booby trap as they're whisked away to a distant planet. *The Dig* has very high production values (including a suspenseful musical score), and appears very promising.

Mallard Software: Mallard has picked up the rights to two games previously published by Wesson International. Both *Lunar Command* (formerly *Moonbase*) and *Air Traffic Controller (ATC)* (formerly *Tracon II*) are currently available; check our "GameBytes" section for a review of *Lunar Command*. Similar to *ATC* is *Tower* (winter), an air-traffic control simulation that puts you atop the control tower of major metropolitan and international airports.


Tower

Mallard also announced it would be producing scenery disks for Microsoft's *Flight Simulator 5.0*, and the previews we saw were stunning in their level of detail. The first disk will be available this summer.

Maxis: This "software toy" publisher has some outstanding products set for upcoming release. *Sim City 2000* (fourth quarter) is, plain and simple, a fantastic upgrade. Anyone who's played the original will be able to jump right in and start city-building, but once inside the program they'll discover that Maxis has listened to customer feedback for four years and incorporated a great many suggestions. The game allows for true 3-D construction — you can now build structures such as tunnels, pipes, subways, and bridges. The game also allows you to import cities created with the original *Sim City*; zoom and view incredibly detailed graphics of new buildings such as universities, libraries, desalination plants, marinas, and sculptures; and you can rotate the city 360 degrees for optimal view. This is a very handsome, deep, and impressive product.


SimFarm

With *Sim Farm* (third quarter), the name says it all. You control nearly every aspect of running a profitable farm: purchasing livestock, seed, pesticide, farm buildings; managing crops and livestock through irrigation; checking soil quality; fighting disease and pests; and following crop prices in order to decide the best time sell and buy. The hi-res graphics are crisp, and the interface gently eases you into this complex product.

Merit: After toiling in relative anonymity the last few years, this Texas-based software house aims to make a big splash with its fall lineup. In *Command Adventures: Starship*, players embark on a mission of intergalactic domination, vying with a variety of alien races for control of 50 different planets. The program's beautiful cinematic sequences and ray-traced graphics give this product tremendous visual appeal. Factor in the capability for modem play, and you have the potential for an intriguing game.

Also on display was *Isle of the Dead*, a game that brings new meaning to the term "graphic" adventure — there's enough blood and gore to make even George Romero blanch. But the big, bright, oh-so-gruesome graphics are strictly of the comic book variety, which shouldn't be surprising since the team that developed the game has a background in comic art. Judging from its premise — unsuspecting tourist crash-lands on a remote, zombie-infested island in the South Pacific — this looks to be a real tongue-in-cheek, teeth-in-flesh kind of adventure.

Two more games round out the list of new releases from Merit. The deluxe edition of the underrated *Tom Landry Strategy Football* features such enhancements as skill editor, more playcalling options, and a schedule editor, all of which Merit incorporated at the behest of end users. And *Kronolog: The Nazi Paradox*, a graphic adventure with a time-travel theme first shown at Winter CES, seems to be progressing quite nicely.

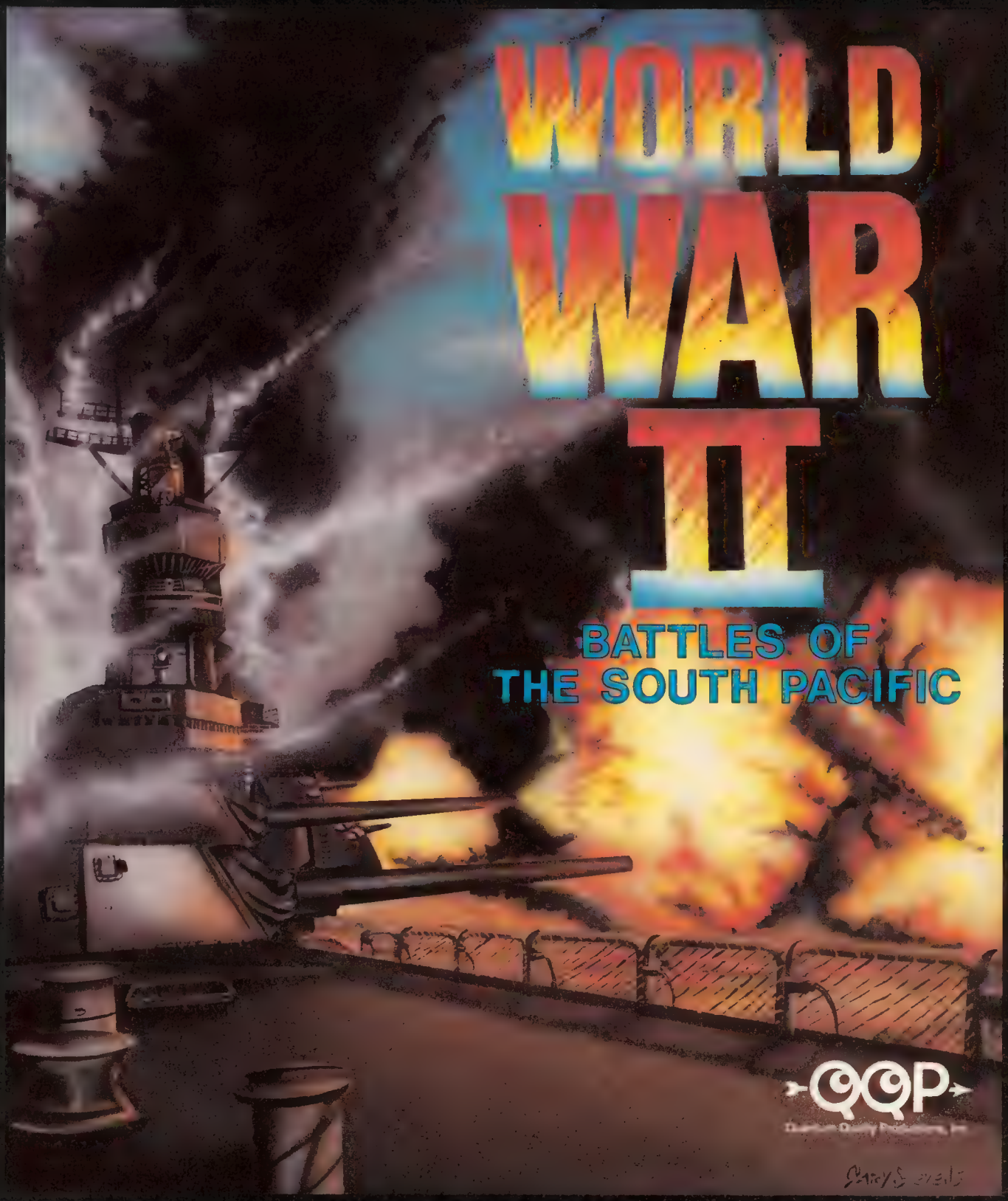
MicroProse: The cliché about having something for everyone definitely applies to MicroProse's slate of summer and fall releases. The company came to CES loaded down with a hoard of games in various stages of development. One of the most striking was *Subwar 2050*, a title that pits sub against sub in futuristic conflict at 20,000 fathoms. The program has the look and feel of a flight simulator, using Gouraud shading to create a realistic 3-D underwater environment. On the other hand, players who prefer to do their dogfighting in more traditional venues can take to the skies in *Fleet Defender*. The AI in this F-14 Tomcat simulator is supposed to be extremely tough, as enemy pilots will use tactics and maneuvers gleaned from training sessions with some of the navy's own Top Guns.

On the sci-fi front, MicroProse announced a trio of new products: *Jagannath*, *Starlord*, and *Master of Orion*. The first is a game of robot vs. robot combat in the Battletech vein, while the latter two are grand strategy affairs that let you vent your imperialistic ambitions across the universe.

Hard on the heels of the well-received *Rex Nebular and the Cosmic Gender Bender* are two more titles employing the same interface: the fantasy adventure *Dragonsphere* and the gothic horror thriller *Return of the Phantom* (the latter is reviewed in this issue). MicroProse also has a 3-D dungeon crawl in the works, *Secret of the Seventh Labyrinth*, as well as the offbeat role-playing game *Bloodnet*, which is being touted as a "Cyberpunk Gothic." Among its many unusual touches, *Bloodnet* features full-screen graphics, with a deliberately distorted perspective that increases the hallucinogenic feel of the adventure.

Dragonsphere

Also on display was *MPS Labs Football*, MicroProse's second sports simulation. The preliminary version we saw boasted very smooth animation, but the other elements of the game were incomplete — we'll have to wait and see if it can challenge *Front Page Sports: Football Pro*. Last but certainly not least is *Sid Meier's Civil War*, a strategic-level war game which focuses on the four years of bloody campaigning in the East, zooming down to the tactical level for battles. Considering the popularity of the recent PBS documentary on the Civil War and Meier's own track



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record, this could turn out to be a war game with enormous crossover appeal.

Microsoft: *Flight Simulator 4.0* was a huge success, and *Microsoft Flight Simulator 5.0* (August) looks a lot better — a heckuva lot better. New features include worldwide travel capabilities, new latitude and longitude system, a "Land Me" feature to help rookies learn the basics of landing an aircraft, and realistic sound effects for instruments, approaching objects, and crashes. Two scenery packs, *Microsoft New York* and *Microsoft Paris*, will be available at the same time.

Also on tap is *Microsoft Space Simulator 1.0* (winter). Microsoft took data from Voyager, Magellan, Viking, and Mariner missions, and also went to NASA for input in designing this simulation, which lets players pilot a variety of spacecraft (including the shuttles) around the solar system and beyond. Designed as an edutainment title from the ground up, *Space Simulator* offers digitized photos of the moon and planets, as well as detailed 3-D renderings that can be approached and orbited.

Mindcraft: By the time you read this, Mindcraft should have three new titles on store shelves, to be followed by several more in the fall. Its popular Siege system continues with a historical, stand-alone variant, *Siege: Walls of Rome*. Mindcraft is also reviving The Magic Candle series with *Bloodstone — An Epic Dwarven Tale*, an adventure with a storyline that predates the first *Magic Candle*. Finally, the *Tegel's Mercenaries* engine gets another go-around, albeit in improved form, in *Strike Squad*. Among the game's many enhancements is a split-screen option for head-to-head play.

Further ahead lies a sequel to *Star Legions*, as well as a game of military, political, diplomatic maneuvering entitled *Dominion*.

NovaLogic: *Wolfpack* is a CD-ROM upgrade of the 1990 classic WWII German sub simulation. Only intro screens were being shown, but it was indeed incredible — the Voxel Space technology and SVGA artwork make for some very photorealistic graphics. Game play was excellent in the original, and for the most part it's unchanged in the new version. Expect *Wolfpack* in time for Christmas.

Origin: *Wing Commander Academy* (fall) is a fully customizable mission-building kit that doesn't require *Wing Commander I* or *II*. Though lacking cinematic sequences, the program adds new Confederation and Kilrathi ships, new weapons, and players can fly for either side. You can save missions to disk (files are very small) to trade with friends. Best of all, *Wing Commander Academy* only takes up 5 megs of hard drive space, and runs quite well on a 386.

Wing Commander Academy

When you first see *Shadowcaster* (fall), the first-person perspective and smoothly scrolling graphics may lead you to believe it's an FRP. But while there are definite fantasy elements, this one is all action. The first joint project from Origin and EA lets the player "morph," changing from a slow, powerful golem to a dragon to an aquatic frogman to a vaporous cloud.

Shadowcaster

Pacific Strike (first quarter '94) incorporates *Strike Commander* flight technology with the storytelling aspects of *Wing Commander* and *Strike Commander*. The game begins after Pearl Harbor, but your performance can change the order of battles and the outcome of the war (you play as American).

Pacific Strike

Papyrus Publishing: *IndyCar Racing* (fourth quarter) is the update to *Indy 500*, EA's hit racing simulation from four years ago. *IndyCar* has all the earmarks of a winner — nice graphics, very realistic physics, authentic tracks, and excellent control. Check the "GameBytes" section for a sneak preview.

Pop Rocket: *Total Distortion* (fourth quarter) is an MPC CD-ROM adventure that combines elements of puzzle games and graphics adventures. Players travel to the Distortion Dimension searching for video clips and other "media treasure," which they use to create music videos for TV producers. The sampled sounds of the Mac version on display were rich and lifelike, and the graphics were also of very high quality.

Psygnosis: *Innocent (until caught)* (September), Psygnosis' first graphic adventure, is set in the 21st century. The storyline is great — you play as a professional thief who's been nabbed by the IRS and handed an enormous tax bill that must be paid in 28 days. The interface is similar to the one found in LucasArts' adventures, so there's little or no learning curve. *Innocent* has a cyberpunk flair, and realistic characters help bring the gritty experience to life.

Another game being previewed was *Hired Guns*, due out this September. Up to four human players can play on a single computer (via joysticks, mouse, and keyboard) in this futuristic squad-level combat game. Nice graphic touches abound, and other features — great sound effects, automapping, and a huge game world — make *Hired Guns* a possible sleeper.

ReadySoft: With the arrival of CD-ROM technology, you can finally play *Dragon's Lair* (October) the way it was meant to be played. We saw a preview version running through an MPEG board, and the animation was phenomenal. (ReadySoft will also have a version ready for the debut of 3DO).

Positronic Bridge (September) has two distinct play levels, basic and competitor. The competitor level includes an option for weak, strong, and variable trump bidding, 5 Card Major or ACOL systems, count and attitude signals, and a feature to add new bidding systems as you improve. ReadySoft claims this is the first bridge game in which the computer doesn't "see" its partner's hand, a very realistic touch if true. *Positronic Bridge* will be bundled with "The Basics of Bridge" by Montgomery Coe.

Two titles announced by ReadySoft but not on display were *The Terror of the Deep* and *Campaign II* (both in October). *The Terror of the Deep* is the second title in the Guy Spy series. Part graphic adventure, part arcade action, *Terror* lets the player control U.N. operative Guy Spy as he recovers missing military hardware. *Campaign II* (October) updates *Campaign* with the addition of new maps, over 100 post-WWII vehicles from Abrams to T72s, and an option that lets the player fly and fight in individual helicopters as well as tanks.

Revell-Monogram: The next three editions in Revell's Power Modeler series are *Backroad Racers*, *Hi-Tech Aircraft*, and a dino-

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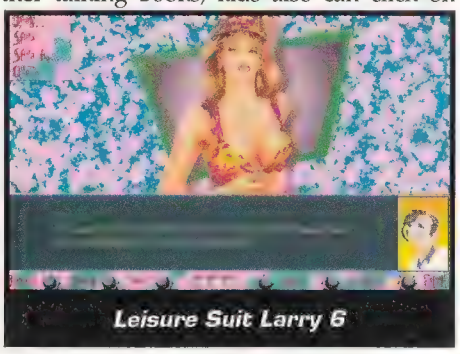
saur modeling kit. *Backroad Racers*, the only one of the new titles on display, will come with a complete plastic model kit of one of the four classic American muscle cars featured in the game. Animated 3-D instructions help users perfect their modeling techniques, and all four cars can be driven on a variety of tracks.

Sanctuary Woods: This Canadian publisher of educational CD-ROM software announced MPC versions of *Shelly Duvall's It's a Bird's Life* and *The Vampire's Coffin*, two titles originally designed for the Macintosh. Also new for MPC systems are the electronic storybook *The Selfish Giant* (summer 1993), based on an Oscar Wilde story and featuring the artwork of children's storybook illustrator P. Craig Russell, and *The Last Dinosaur Egg*, with Victor Vector and his St. Bernard Yondo (the heros of *The Vampire's Coffin*) venturing into the past to recover a Tyrannosaurus Rex egg.

Sanctuary Woods also said it would begin marketing its products under two new brands, the I-Tales Collection (*The Selfish Giant* and *It's a Bird's Life*) and the I-Venture series (*The Vampire's Coffin* and *The Last Dinosaur Egg*).

Sierra On-Line: *King's Quest VI* arrives on CD-ROM this summer, with digitized speech for all dialogue. While this in itself isn't groundbreaking, Sierra has developed a new lip-synching technique that is by far the best we've ever seen for animated characters — it's as good as many animated films! The new technique will be incorporated into all of Sierra's titles, and could set a new standard in animated speech.

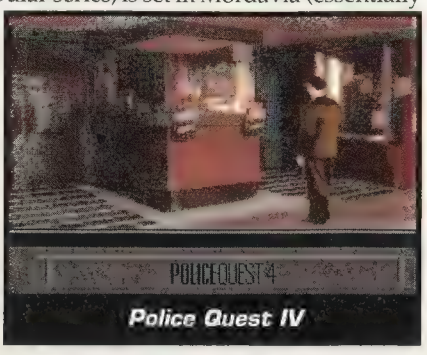
Slater and Charlie Go Camping, an electronic storybook with two cute dinosaurs in the title roles, has just been released. As the narrator relates the comic adventures of the two dinos, kids can click on words to get reading help or to create their own sentences. Like other talking books, kids also can click on graphic objects to activate funny animations.


Leisure Suit Larry 6

Leisure Suit Larry 6 (Christmas): Everyone's favorite nerd is back in his fifth adventure. Players may be gun-shy after the "too easy" *Larry V*, but Sierra assures us that this one is considerably tougher; if *Freddy Pharkas* (also by *Leisure Suit Larry* creator Al Lowe) is any gauge, this *Larry* should be quite a challenge.

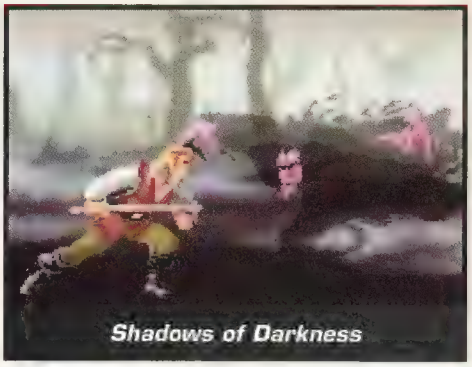
Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Father (October) is a moody, atmospheric graphic adventure in which you investigate a series of ritualistic murders, and try to discover the link between Gabriel, his nightmares, and a love affair that took place 300 years earlier. Conversation is handled via dialogue trees, with both characters' faces present onscreen.

Quest for Glory IV: Shadows of Darkness (October), the latest installment in the popular series, is set in Mordavia (essentially Transylvania). *Shadows* incorporates some new graphics twists, and loyal fans of the series will be glad to know that you can import characters from any of the first three *Quest* games.



Police Quest IV

Police Quest IV (November) puts you on the trail of a serial murderer, and from what we saw this could be the most polished title in the series. Many of the background scenes were shot in Los Angeles, with the ethnic and cultural diversity of that sprawling city kept intact by Sierra. And the violence intrinsic to the subject matter hasn't been whitewashed — the first victim you find bears cigarette burns and other signs of torture.


Shadows of Darkness

Finally, Sierra is working on a space flight simulation. Two former NASA scientists were called in to assist in the development of the currently untitled product, and the SVGA screens we saw were very realistic.

Sir-Tech: *Blades of Destiny*, currently available, is reviewed elsewhere in this issue. *Jagged Alliance* (fall) is an interesting blend of resource management, squad-level combat, and role playing. The game puts you on a mission to reclaim an island from terrorists, which you accomplish through hiring, commanding, and managing a group of mercenaries. The game allows you to control almost every aspect of the operation, and your performance affects the attitudes of the mercenaries you've recruited. It's a very deep game that should provide at least 30-40 hours of play.

Software Sorcery: From the makers of last year's *Sea Rogue* comes *Jutland*, the first war game designed exclusively for the CD-ROM platform (see "The Desktop General" elsewhere in this issue.) Coming up fast in *Jutland*'s wake is *Aegis*, scheduled for launch in late summer. *Aegis* puts players in command of an Aegis-class cruiser in deadly hide-and-seek confrontations with enemy ships, planes, and subs. SVGA graphics, a CD-quality soundtrack, and digitized video from the defense department highlight a product that, in tandem with *Jutland*, just might redefine the notion of what computer war games are all about. Software Sorcery also expects to publish two more titles later in the year: the outer space adventure *Dead Zone, Jr.*, and the medieval role-playing game *Fantasy Fiefdom*.

Software Toolworks: Software Toolworks was showing only a single new game, but what a game it is, built around an irresistible combination of features. *Star Wars Chess* marries the powerful Chessmaster engine with superb animated effects as Luke Skywalker, Darth Vader, and the rest of your favorites from the movie trilogy take to the chess board. A disk-based version of the game will be available in the fall, followed by an enhanced CD-ROM translation in the winter.

A host of CD-ROM reference works were also on display, reaffirming Software Toolworks' status as one of the leading publishers in this area. Information addicts will be able to lose themselves for months in such captivating products as *The New Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia* and *The 20th Century Almanac* (the last weighing in at a whopping five discs).

Spectrum Holobyte: *Tornado* came into our offices just as we reached deadline, so look for a complete review in our next issue. Also in our next issue will be coverage of *MiG-29: Deadly Adversary of Falcon 3.0*, an add-on for *Falcon 3.0* that lets you fly in or against the highly praised Russian fighter. *MiG-29* is part of the Electronic Battlefield series, as is *Warthog A-10*, which is expected to ship sometime during the fourth quarter.

Due out slightly later is *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (first quarter '94). This graphic adventure, which features SVGA graphics and a space flight simulator, allows you to play as any

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With *Joe Montana NFL Football* (October), Spectrum hopes to challenge the primacy of *Front Page Sports: Football*. Though the arcade sections were apparently developed by Sega Sports — which did quite well with its Joe Montana games for the Genesis — Spectrum has been working on strategic elements such as drafts, trades, salary negotiations, injuries, and so forth. The early version we saw sported a very logical interface and plenty of options. Also scheduled for an October release is *David Robinson NBA Action*, a pro basketball sim also developed in conjunction with Sega Sports.

Strategic Simulations, Inc.: Despite recent layoffs, SSI was bustling with new products, not the least of which was *Dark Sun: Shattered Lands*. SSI confirmed that the showcase title for its 16-bit AD&D role-playing engine would be out the door by the end of August. Joining it will be *Stronghold*, a kingdom simulator set in the Dungeons & Dragons milieu that sports some nifty 3-D battle displays.

Another D&D-based title scheduled for imminent release is *Fantasy Empires*. Based on the *Cyber Empires* engine, *Fantasy Empires* picks up where *Stronghold* leaves off as players try to expand their kingdoms into empires. Easily the program's most novel touch is the inclusion of an on-screen dungeon master who handles different game functions, and even comments on your performance during play.

Companies routinely hype their products by promising "endless hours of fun," but for SSI's upcoming *Dungeon Hacks*, the claim is no idle boast. This first-person, 3-D adventure regenerates dungeon levels during play, with monsters and puzzles customized to your character class. *Dungeon Hack*'s design team, Event Horizon *(The Summoning, Veil of Darkness)*, is also working on a multicharacter role-playing game set in the AD&D gothic horror world of Ravenloft. Both products are scheduled for release later this year.

Two more SSI titles, both remakes of older games, should be released before summer's end. *Archon Ultra* adds sparkling 3-D graphics and animation to the entertaining mix of chesslike strategy and arcade action that made the original Archon such a hit in the mid-1980s. Meanwhile, *Gary Grigsby's War in Russia* gives his aging *Second Front* design a second lease on life by adding VGA graphics, a mouse-driven interface, and a host of other improvements to the program.

Three-Sixty Pacific: The four new war games unveiled by 360 exhibited all of the craftsmanship and top-flight styling that have become the company's hallmarks. Thanks to an ultra-slick interface and sparkling SVGA graphics, the company's redevelopment of *High Command* seemed for all intents and purposes a brand new game (see our "GameBytes" section elsewhere in this issue). Meanwhile, the V for Victory series continues to roll right along with the latest installment, *Gold*Juno*Sword*, which recreates the Normandy campaign from the British side of things.

Harpoon II (October) was also on display, and in every respect it looks like a quantum leap beyond its predecessor. The program will utilize advanced fuzzy logic for a vastly improved AI, and will also support 32-bit operating systems. Scheduled to ship around the same time is *Victory at Sea*, a strategic-cum-operational simulation of World War II in the Pacific. The game covers just about everything you could imagine, from Japanese fuel shortages to the army-navy infighting that hobbled the war effort of both sides. Noted military historian Jim Dunnigan, the game's designer, also contributed some 100,000 words of historical background and analysis that can be accessed on-line through a Hypertext reader.

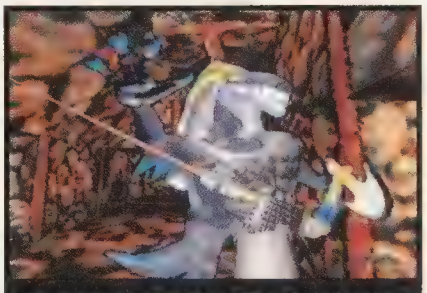
As for its eagerly awaited Civil War series, Three-Sixty was showing very little of *Drums of Glory* (first quarter). Scaled at the regimental level, the initial game in the series will recreate, appropriately enough, the first pitched fight of the war, the Battle of Bull Run.

Tsunami: Tsunami was displaying *Blue Force*, the latest design by ex-cop Jim Walls of Police Quest fame. In *Blue Force*, the player starts as a rookie motorcycle officer, but later gets bounced from the force and has to continue his investigations as a private eye. As has been the case in every Jim Walls' product, a gritty sense of realism will pervade the entire affair.

Blue Force

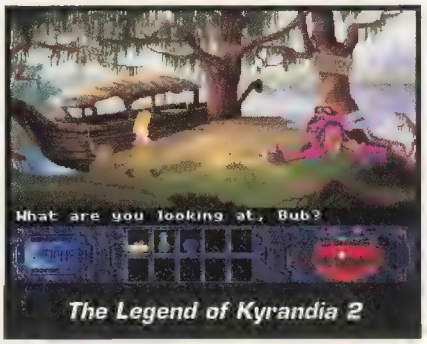
The company announced the imminent conversion of all of its products to CD-ROM. Each CD-ROM title will contain the original game plus a variety of extras. For instance, *Ringworld* will include a 30-minute interview with Larry Niven, author of the Ringworld novels.

Twin Dolphin Games: This newcomer was showing *Forgotten Castle: The Awakening* (fall), a CD-ROM role-playing game that boasts the most realistic, smoothly scrolling first-person graphics we've ever seen in a game, bar none. *Forgotten Castle* takes place in the forest, in a city, inside a castle, and of course in the dungeons below the castle. If the game play matches the graphics, this could be a beauty.


Forgotten Castle: The Awakening

Virgin: *The Legend of Kyrandia 2* should be out this fall. The first *Kyrandia* was well-received by adventure fans, and *Kyrandia 2* looks to build on that success. The focus this time around is on Zanthia, a female character from the first game, and Westwood Studios, the developers of the Kyrandia series, promises that this installment will be bigger, prettier, and tougher than the original.

A very handsome FRP, *Lands of Lore*, is also being developed by Westwood. These guys know fantasy — Westwood developed the first two *Eye of the Beholder* games — and a lot of care has been taken to make this game accessible to newcomers to the fantasy genre, yet still satisfy the demands of grizzled FRP veterans. Great graphics, innovative interface, and wonderful sounds make *Lands of Lore* one to watch for.



The Legend of Kyrandia 2

Quadra Interactive: *The Journeyman Project* is a graphic adventure with a time travel theme. *Journeyman* originally appeared on the Mac, where it received rave reviews for its graphics, soundtrack, and engrossing game play. The MS-DOS version will be for MPC systems, and should be ready sometime during the fourth quarter.

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[illegible]mpre[illegible]

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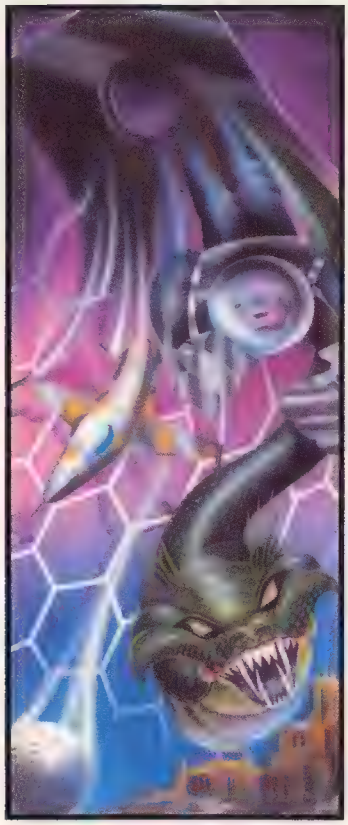
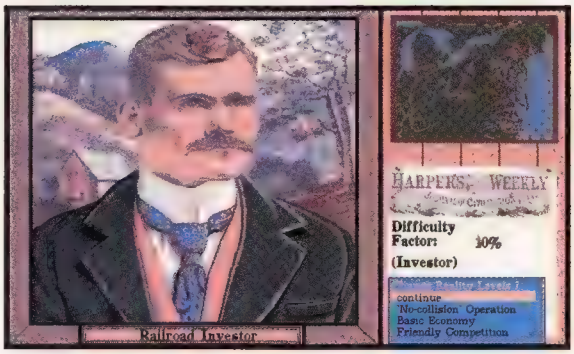


EXTENDED PLAY

ADD-ONS • SCENARIO DISKS • BUG PATCHES

RAILROAD TYCOON DELUXE: THE RIGHT WAY TO UPDATE A CLASSIC

T. LIAM MCDONALD



Railroad Tycoon Deluxe Edition

What is a classic? The Oxford English Dictionary defines a classic as something "of acknowledged importance." But in the realm of computer games, a classic seems to be a game that's reissued in pretty new packaging and stickered with a "Deluxe Edition" label.

Few gamers would argue that Sid Meier's *Railroad Tycoon* is a classic, and now we have a sure sign of that status: the new, greatly revamped *Railroad Tycoon Deluxe Edition* from **MicroProse**.

Is it just another old game in pretty new box?

Hardly. This edition is truly worthy of the designation "deluxe." The game itself has been expanded, and given a whole new look. There are two new continents — South America and Africa — to lay with track and depots, and now the *entire* United States (rather than just the Eastern or Western halves) is available to the rail baron in all of us. These aren't just new places to drop track, either: New strategies are required to win. Victory in Africa, for example, depends on your control of seaports. In many ways, this feels like an entirely new game.

That new feel is due in part to more intelligent, utterly ruthless artificial opponents. You thought you had problems with your rivals in the original? These guys will eat you alive, even in the less-competitive Investor mode. There have been some rule changes, too. Railroad cars now cost $5000 each, and bankruptcy carries a 1% penalty.

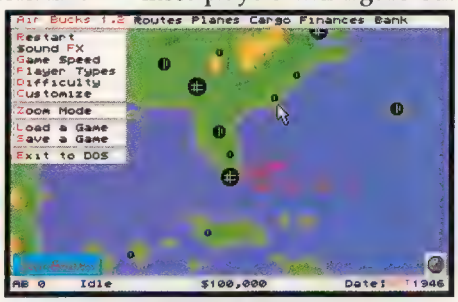
There's also a vast array of new sounds — voices, music, and effects — and greatly enhanced VGA graphics. The maps could have been spiffed up a bit more, but otherwise everything looks terrific. There are some new animations, but that old favorite — the little guys building the bridges — is gone. Ten new trains have been added as compensation, along with a new wrinkle: train holdups! So I guess I can't complain....

Railroad Tycoon Deluxe Edition is not only a classic, but a significant improvement on a game many thought couldn't get much better. The game now consumes twice as much hard disk space, but that only brings the total up to 5 megs. *Railroad Tycoon* junkies beware! You're not going to tear yourself away from this one for a long time.

Air Bucks V. 1.2

Unlike *Railroad Tycoon*, *Air Bucks*, from **Impressions Software**, didn't achieve classic status upon its initial release. A fairly unanimous hostile reaction from gamers and press alike sent the game's developers back to the drawing board. The result is *Air Bucks Version 1.2* (also available as a patch), which goes a long way toward correcting the problems of the initial version, but still falls short of realizing the full potential of the game's concept.

At the risk of flogging a dead horse, *Air Bucks* is basically *Railroad Tycoon* in the skies. The comparison begs to be made: Players compete for landing rights to certain cities, buy planes, set up routes, haul passengers and cargo, etc. It *sounds* like a good idea — and now, with an improved interface, *Air Bucks* is a big step closer to being worthy of the above comparison. But to borrow a phrase from a certain senator from Texas: "*Air Bucks*, you're no *Railroad Tycoon*."



Air Bucks Version 1.2

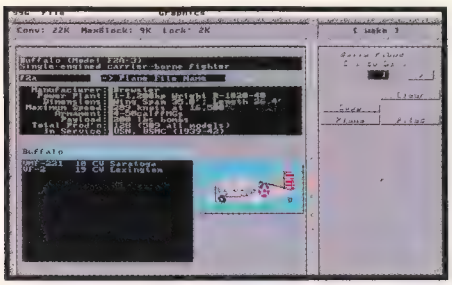
The redesign includes much-improved 256 color graphics, a zoom mode, an improved economic model, some new sound effects and music, more detailed reports, simplified data entry, and improved (?) computer opponents.

But while *Railroad Tycoon Deluxe* has tightened up its artificial intelligence (AI) to the point of genius, *Air Bucks* has merely reached a static level of banality. Your opponents do *exactly* the same thing all of the time! No matter how disastrous their course of action, the computer opponents will stick to it doggedly. You don't have to drive these guys into bankruptcy — they do it to themselves.

This is a pretty good game, but it has a major shortcoming that hampers replayability. After a few sessions, most players will figure out the opponents' patterns of acquisition and determine which cities to secure rights to first, and that's it. Some more random factors in the AI would have made *Air Bucks* a lot more interesting. As it stands, though, we can only hope for another upgrade.

Carriers at War Construction Kit

One way around weak AI routines is to write them yourself. *Carriers at War Construction Kit*, an add-on to the super Australian war game *Carriers at War*, puts this ability in the hands of the gamer. Allowing unprecedented access to AI routines and vessel specs, the developers at **SSG** have produced what may well be the definitive wargame construction kit.



Carriers at War Construction Kit

A 100-page tutorial guides you through all elements involved in creating a scenario. Mapping, graphics, data bases, victory conditions, ratings and specs for ships, submarines, and aircraft positioning, leadership ability, and myriad other factors can all be determined by the gamer.

The niftiest part of the *CAW Construction Kit* is its WarRoom system of WarCards. These cards form the artificial intelligence of your opponent, and allow gamers access to intelligence routines that make decisions during game play. A total of 75 WarCards make up the AI for the tutorial Wake Island scenario. Any scenario can be studied and edited to create historical variants and fresh challenges. New maps are designed with a simple map-painting tool, and new ships and planes created from scratch.

But there's more! There are also speculative scenarios for an invasion of the Gilbert Islands and the capture of Guadalcanal, plus new variants for previous *Carriers at War* scenarios. The *Carriers At War Construction Kit* is the best wargame add-on of the year, hands down.

Deja Vu, and More

The original *Deja Vu* was one of the first graphic adventures I played. With dazzling two color (black and not-black) graphics and sound effects compliments of the PC speaker, it was a dandy little film noire thriller. The story was simple: You wake up in a dirty bathroom with no idea who you are. You quickly learn that you've been framed for murder, and both the mob and the cops are gunning for you. As you travel the seedy side of town (above and below ground), you collect the obligatory objects and try to keep yourself from being buttonholed. Then, after all this mess is cleared up, you're back at it again in *Deja Vu 2*.

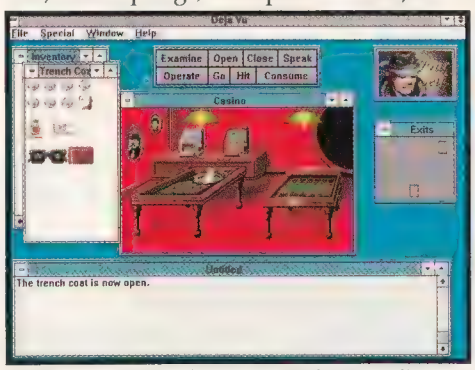
ICOM Simulations has taken both these simple but entertaining games, adapted them for Windows use, and spiffed up the static graphics with 256 colors. Titled *Deja Vu I & II: The Casebooks of Ace Harding*, the collection makes a neat addition to your Windows game group.

Don't the folks at **Access** ever get tired of bringing the best golf courses in the world to our computer screens? The newest *Links* add-on is The Belfry's Brabazon Course in Great Britain, home of the 1993 Rider Cup.

Access seems to be alternating exotic courses (Mauna Kea, Banff Springs) with plain courses (Pinehurst, The Belfry) in order to provide a nice mix of styles. The Belfry, unfortunately, is probably the weakest yet in this exceptional series. There are few truly challenging holes, and none of the high drama (sharp angles, fierce winds, tangled gorse) that define the better British courses. It's lightly bunkered, relatively straight, with few water hazards and only a handful of long holes (though these measure up to a 569 yard, par 5). The 18th and the 10th have water hazards that require some fancy placement, and the greens seem more terraced than many American courses, but otherwise The Belfry is only a moderate challenge.

The Belfry

The original *Harpoon* from **360 Pacific** is slowly fading away, to be replaced within a year by *Harpoon II*. As a swan song, 360 has released *Harpoon Designers Series II: Post-Graduate Naval Operations & Tactics* for all those dogged sub-junkies who can't get enough. This add-on creates 12 new scenarios for each installed BattleSet, allowing up to 48 new scenarios for those who have all the BattleSets. Each scenario is designed to teach a certain tactical skill, such as long-range defense or rescuing isolated assets. Most valuable, however, is the massive "Data Annex," a text file weighing in around 1.5 megs with a truly mind-boggling mass of detail on various weapons platforms. Also included is a helpful Tactical Guide with tips for winning. This final set rounds out the *Harpoon* series very nicely, with a good mix of scenarios and a wealth of supplementary material.



Deja Vu I & II: The Casebooks of Ace Harding

Tony LaRussa Ultimate Baseball II has finally released its *MLBPA Players Disk*, with stats for the 1992 season. After wading through a downright defective installation program and hurdling what seems to be a graphics bug that makes the bottom of the screen wash out, I determined that this is basically a stats disk, with all those numbers that make baseball fans woozy but which look like Trident missile launch codes to me. Go to it, sports fans.

Bug Patches

Editor's Note: Contact game publishers for info on bug patch availability.

- *Battles of Destiny* version 1.1: Fixes modem play, the map editor, and patrol mode.
- Binary Zoo's *Mystery at the Museums*, *Rock and Bach Studios*, and *Wild Science Arcade*: Separate sound-card patches available.
- *Buzz Aldrin's Race into Space* version 1.00b: Adds an Undo key and fixes screen blackouts.
- *Caesar*: Corrects culture and disk compression problems.
- *Carriers at War*: Fixes the CAP bug and a few minor problems in the *Carriers at War Construction Kit*.
- *Empire Deluxe* version 3.1: Alleviates numerous bugs.
- *Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis*: Allows the game to run on a 486 without color problems or errors.
- *Jordan In Flight*: Fixes video board problems.
- *Jump Jet*: Fixes Thrustmaster rudder control problems
- *Pirates! Gold*: Corrects various bugs.
- *Realms of Arkania*: Corrects Skeletarius, Stoerrebrandt, and Daspota problems.
- *Unlimited Adventures* version 1.1: Fixes multiple bugs and includes a manual supplement.
- *X-Wing: Imperial Pursuit*: corrects target lock-on problems.
- *X-Wing*: offers a Roland patch.

ALTERNATE LIVES

BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR: ALL HAIL THE NEW KING!

NEIL RANDALL

Every once in a while, a fantasy role-playing game comes along that challenges the conventions of the genre. Unfortunately, such games aren't very common. While there's no shortage of solid FRPs, few seem willing to push hard at the genre's boundaries. But perhaps because the design team at Dynamix involved a real novelist in the creation of their first FRP, *Betrayal at Krondor* does just that.

I haven't been knocked out by an FRP in quite some time. I've been impressed by several — Sir-Tech's *Crusaders of the Dark Savant*, Interplay's *The Two Towers*, Origin's *Serpent Isle*, to name a few. Still, despite the great strengths of these games, none seemed to contribute to an evolution of the genre. That's precisely what *Krondor* has done, though. This game sets a new benchmark for future FRPs.

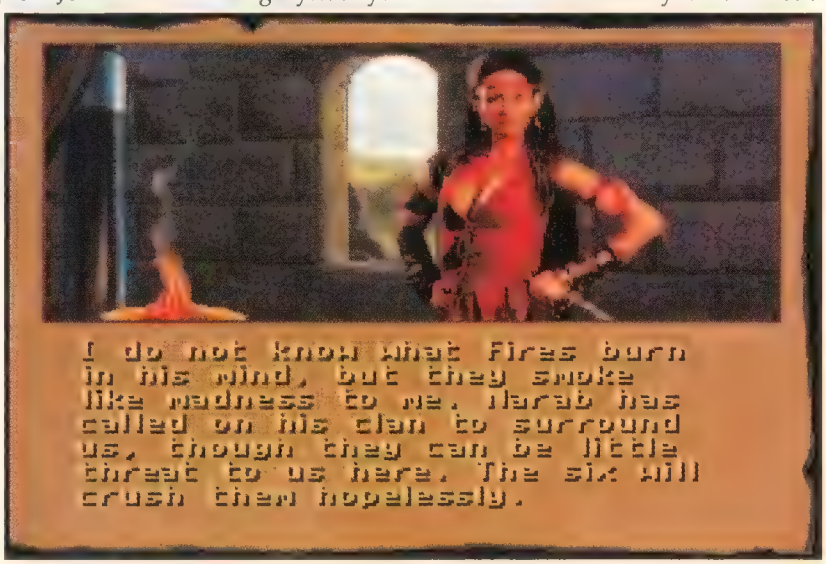
There's still a great deal to be resolved before computerized role-playing can rival the storytelling potential and the use of the imagination that are the hallmarks of the best paper-and-pencil role-playing games. But *Krondor* is a game that responds superbly to many gamers' gripes — and even, I suspect, to those of many designers.

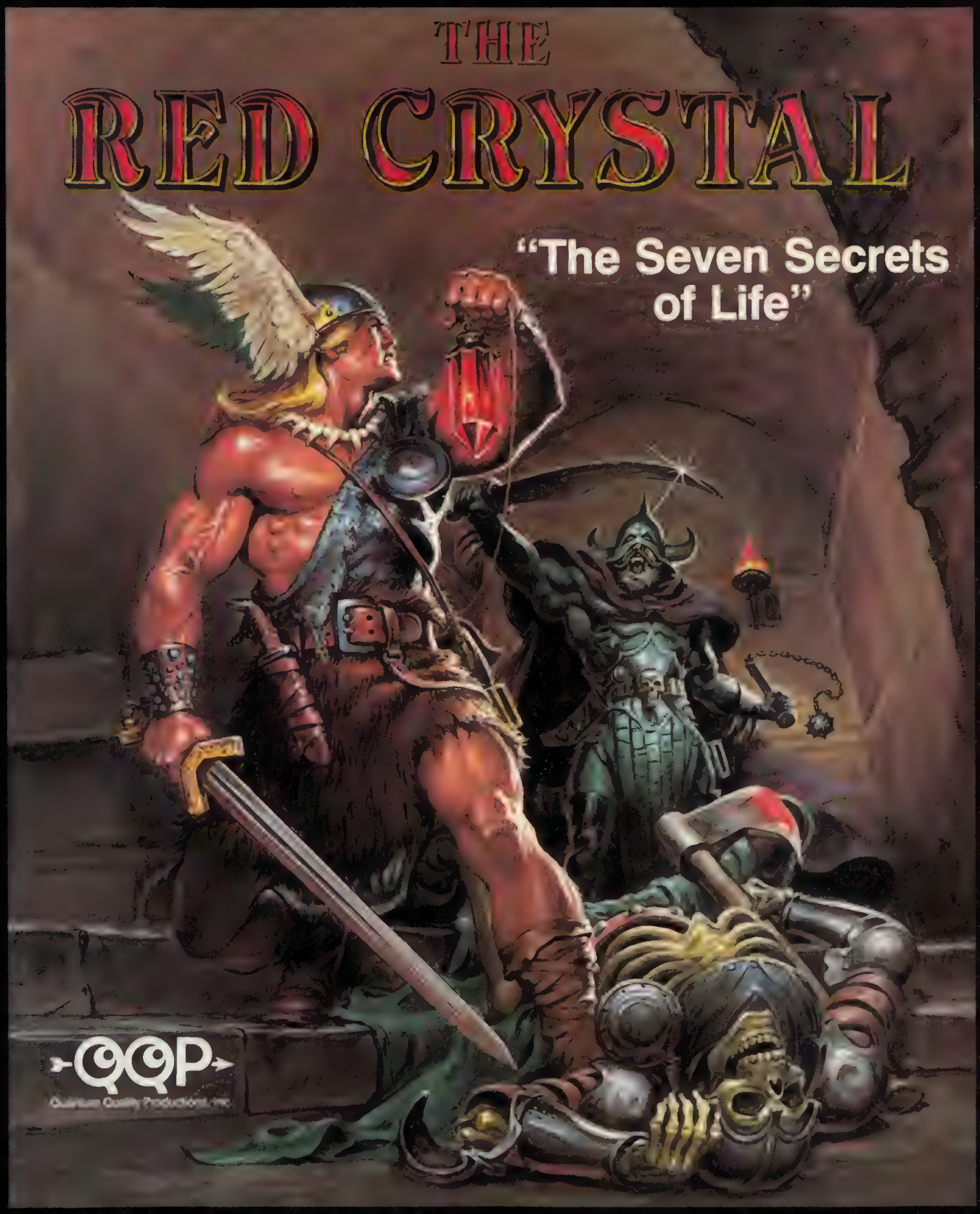
Betrayal at Krondor is set in the world of Raymond E. Feist's Riftworld novels. Feist has been a gamer for several years, and in his introduction to the *Krondor* manual he describes his significant role in the creation of this game. He claims (and anyone who's followed the FRP genre knows this is tough to swallow) that Krondor comes as close as any game yet to capturing the experience of reading a good novel. This, together with chief designer John Cutter's stated goal of providing an interactive story with multi-dimensional characters capable of stirring player's emotions, might sound like so much hype. We know that playing a good FRP is nothing at all like reading a good fantasy novel. A sad, but repeatedly proven, fact.

The proof is in the pudding, though, and *Krondor* achieves these lofty objectives. The game is divided into chapters like a novel, with an overall mystery guiding the plot. Essentially, each chapter is a new level in the game, with the bad guys getting stronger and the tasks more difficult as you progress. But the increased challenge seems to flow naturally from the story itself, in much the same way a novel grows more complex as its plot unfolds. It's not just a case of battling two-headed dragons instead of one-headed, or wrestling three ogres at a time instead of one — and the distinction lends credence to the designers' claims.

The game takes quite a while to install, and occupies over 14 megabytes on your hard drive. That's not an outlandish requirement these days, but add a few saved games and things quickly get out of hand. Each saved game takes up 374k of disk space! By the time you finish Chapter One, it's quite likely you'll have 10-15 saves, and that can easily mean over 5 more megabytes. Keep saving games through the next couple of chapters, and suddenly your 14 meg game is 30 megs huge. At the very least, you'll want to have 20MB of free disk space before you start.

Memory requirements are nearly as exacting. You'll need almost 600K of conventional memory free to play the game, and that's after you've loaded a


I do not know what fires burn in his mind, but they smoke like madness to me. Harab has called on his clan to surround us, though they can be little threat to us here. The six will crush them hopelessly.



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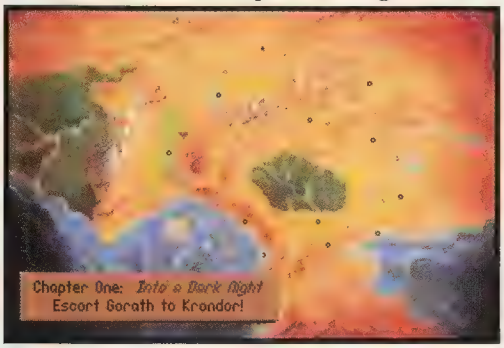
mouse driver. Use a memory manager to help you load everything high, or be prepared to use a boot disk.

Once you've finally made it into *Krondor*, though, all that fuss quickly seems worthwhile. The top two-thirds of the screen display an unusually wide, first-person view of the area straight ahead, and you can choose from several levels of detail depending on your system's performance. At the highest detail level you'll see roads, trees, buildings, and upcoming opponents as clearly and realistically as in any FRP on the market. Furthermore, because you can see bad guys ahead of you, you can often avoid combat by finding a way around the trouble — an option not provided in most FRPs.



Nor is this the only view available. Click on the Map button in the lower right corner and you get a wider, overhead view of your surroundings. Click again, and you're shown the strategic map, which gives your exact location.

You can move your party by clicking on the movement icon, but using the arrow keys is faster. A nice touch is the Road Movement option: When the party reaches a road, click on the Follow Road button, then hold the Up arrow and have your characters move ahead on the road. This is very handy for getting places quickly, and is another example of the attention to detail that went into the game's interface.

Several elements of *Krondor* stand out, but none so much as the combat system. Combat in many FRPs can become monotonous, and too often it's graphically uninteresting as well. *Krondor* solves the first problem reasonably well, and the second superbly. In fact, combat looks so good in this game that it takes a great many battles before the sheer novelty of the system wears off.

When you enter combat, the view shifts from first-person to a realistic third-person perspective and you see all battle participants arrayed across the combat area. Each participant takes a unique turn, with the choice of moving, fighting, casting spells, resting, or fleeing the battle. A character who thrusts with a sword actually looks like he's doing so, and his animations are different from a character who swings an axe. Similarly, a magic-user looks like he's casting a spell, and the spells themselves differ graphically. The battles actually look like battles, and the bodies of defeated warriors stay where they fall.

As the game progresses, you naturally expect everything to be as realistic as the combat scenes. *Krondor* doesn't maintain this graphic realism all the time (temple visits are especially disappointing), but on the whole does an outstanding job.

There's more to recommend *Krondor* than just its realistic look, though. The game has real depth in both plot and characterization, and a credible, cohesive fantasy world that ties it all together. As the story begins, for example, two characters must escort a third, the mysterious Gorath, south along the coast towards the city of Krondor (the goal of Chapter One). But you'll begin to mistrust Gorath along the way. Still, you're called upon to escort him farther — to the Black Sheep Tavern in the town of Romney. In Romney, you'll learn new, conflicting information about Gorath, and you'll start to wonder if he'll eventually betray you. Chapter Three has you solve a murder mystery, and eventually you discover that real trouble is mounting, with Gorath somehow at its center. The fact that you're unsure of Gorath's motives and even consider that *Betrayal at Krondor* unquestionably advances the state of the genre.

true personality, yet must trust him, casts a strong novelistic tension over the game. It's still not exactly like reading a book, but it's closer.

That said, *Krondor* falls a bit short in some areas. Inventory management, as in most FRPs, becomes extremely tedious after a while, and the stunning combat graphics are overshadowed somewhat by the length of some battles and the fact that characters miss their targets on a frustratingly frequent basis. A way to reload a game in the middle of a battle that you're clearly losing would be a big help, too. Still, these are minor complaints when you

Every once in a while, an FRP comes along that challenges the conventions of the genre. *Betrayal at Krondor* does just that, and sets a new benchmark for future FRPs.

Dynamix, 1600 Mill Race Road, Eugene OR 97403

THE DESKTOP GENERAL

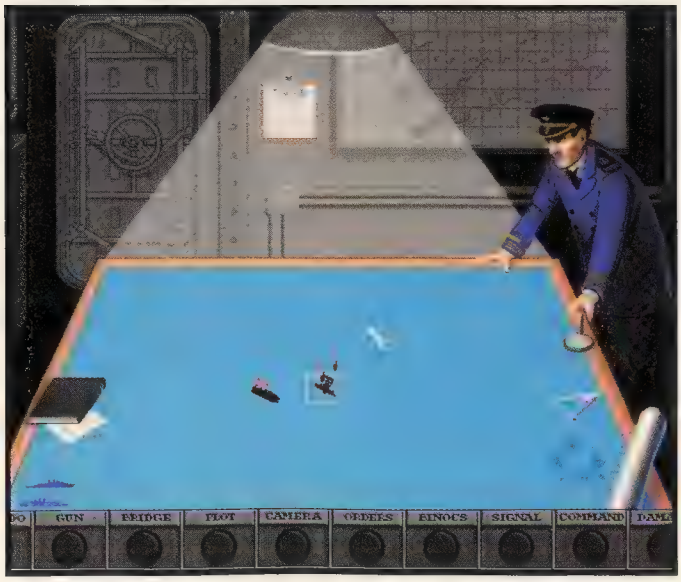
"VERY PRETTY, ADMIRAL, BUT WILL THEY FIGHT?"

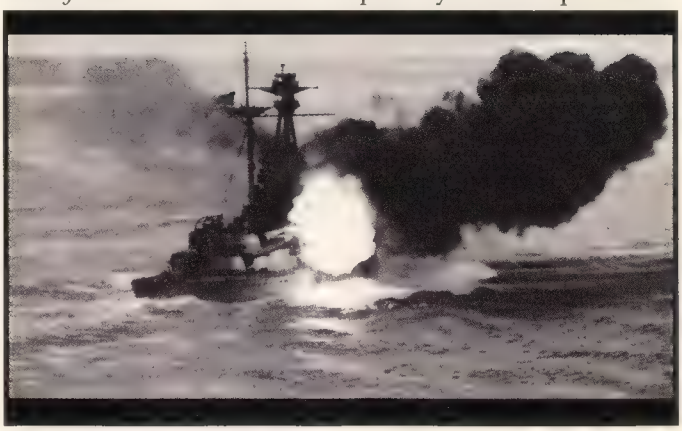
WILLIAM R. TROTTER

I've just played my first CD-ROM war game — *Jutland*, from **Software Sorcery**. It was not so much a *qualitatively* different experience as it was *quantitatively* different. And I think that, despite some peculiar little flaws, it brings us closer to the ideal naval war game.

Taking full advantage of the CD's storage capabilities, Software Sorcery has filled this simulation with lush, eye-popping graphics. The title screen is a good example: a smoothly animated, bow-on shot of two majestic dreadnoughts breasting the sea, spray fanning out on both sides. This scene is accompanied — as is much of the game — by a first-rate musical score that calls to mind *Victory at Sea*.

Graphic and sonic blandishments abound. Between battles, you see actual WWI film footage (customized to show your name and the victories — or defeats — you recently experienced), set to the delightful strains of a palm-court salon ensemble. When a ship takes a hit to one of its magazines, you see stupendous explosions and stunning views of the ship either capsizing — its blood-red hull slowly turning turtle — or sliding under the waves in a welter of flames. If the sinking sequences (or lack of them) in other naval simulations have disappointed you, these will not: When a ship sinks in *Jutland*, it *really* sinks.



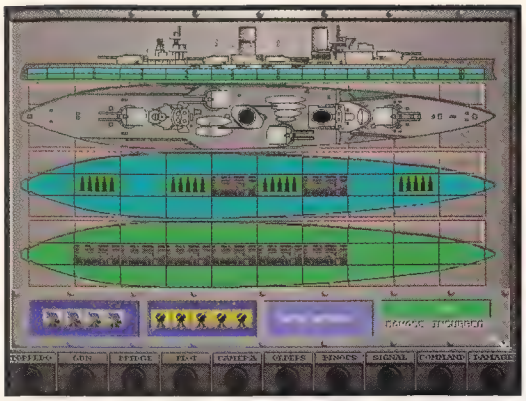


The sound effects are potent indeed: the loudest and most menacing gunfire sounds I've ever heard in a computer game, coupled with the menacing freight-train whooshes of enemy shells passing overhead, and deeper, throatier explosions to signify hits. Every order you issue is seconded by digitized voices, and a helpful spotter's voice ("All shots long! Lower range by three hundred yards!") corrects your fall-of-shot.

You can play individual battles (Coronel, Heligoland Bight, the Falklands), or the title scenario with its vast, far-flung squadrons and its moments of intense, operatic drama. Each battle may be played at three levels of command: ship's captain, squadron leader, or admiral. Naturally, command decisions become increasingly complex as you move up in rank.

There's an interesting campaign game, too, that not only links together the featured battles, but intersperses them with dozens of smaller actions, including, for the German side, some devastating raids against British shipping lanes. Promotions and rewards may come your way — or, if your luck runs out, a watery grave.

The developers have included a novel twist in the campaign games: If you enjoy a very successful patrol, the news of your victory spurs the people to buy more war bonds. Accu-



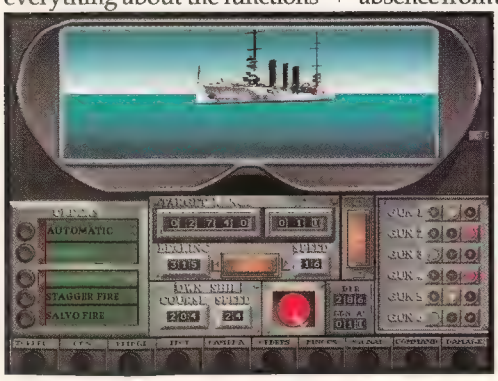
currently available to you. Pressing F5 brings up a detailed, richly illustrated manual and historical guide.

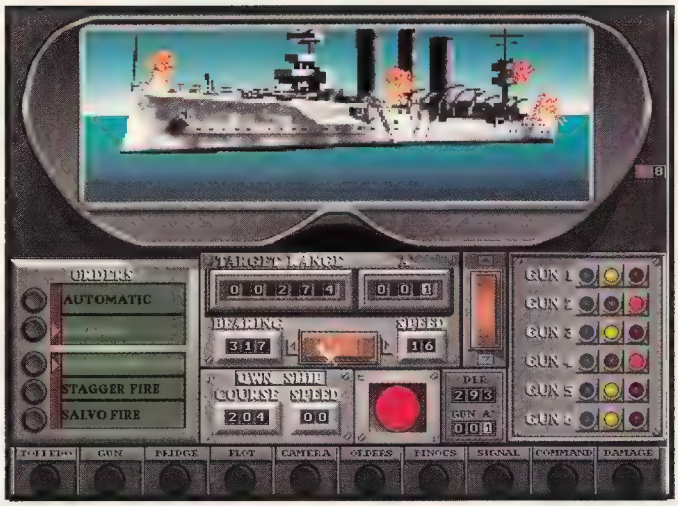
Jutland recreates the naval battles of a classic era with beautiful graphics and awesome sounds. It provides an object lesson in what CD-ROM sims can achieve in the way of chrome and extras. But as always, game play is the bottom-line issue, and here I must express a few reservations and/or suggestions.

Even as I was absorbed in my first battles, I had the nagging sensation that something just didn't look quite right, even though I couldn't put my finger on it. Finally, while observing some of the nifty newsreel footage, it dawned on me: These battles are too *clean*. It almost seems as though the designers, having worked so hard on all these gorgeous graphics, could not bring themselves to mess things up in the name of realism.

But these were *coal-powered* warships, and in every newsreel shot, they trail thick ribbons of stack-gasses behind them. In the historical battle of Jutland, smoke — or its sudden absence from a change of course or a shift in wind — was a major factor in visibility and gunnery. In *Jutland* the game, all the warships look to be nuclear powered: no smoke anywhere.

Of course, no one would suggest depicting a truly realistic amount of coal-smoke in this simulation; half the screen would be black most of the time. But *some* suggestion of it would go a long way toward creating the illusion of reality.





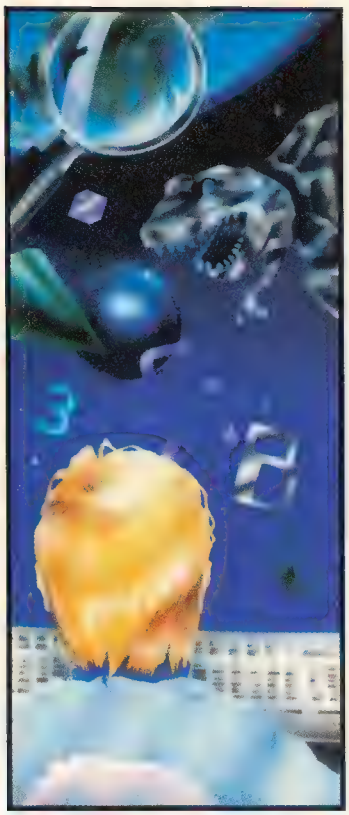
Jutland provides an object lesson in what CD-ROM sims can achieve — but as always, game play is the bottom-line issue.

Similarly, enemy warships produce no smoke or flame from their broadsides as they fire on you. Occasionally, you see their big shells arcing through the air, but too often you get the eerie impression that you're firing on targets that don't shoot back. MicroProse handled this detail just right. *Jutland's* designers seem oblivious to it.

There is an annoying problem with the Orders screen, too. The list of possible commands defaults to "Hard to Port," and if you don't input another command or select "No Further Orders" before exiting, your ship will begin to steam in tight circles, ruining your gunnery solutions. Worse yet, you can input only one command at a time; you cannot, for instance, issue an order "Starboard 20 degrees; commence firing." Instead, you would have to input the first command, exit the screen, re-enter the Orders screen, and then input the second. Do this 50 times in one battle, and it gets to be irritating.

What we have here, then, is 90 percent of a great naval simulation. If you have any interest at all in this sub-genre, you really *must* see Jutland — if only to gaze in wonder at its many beauties.

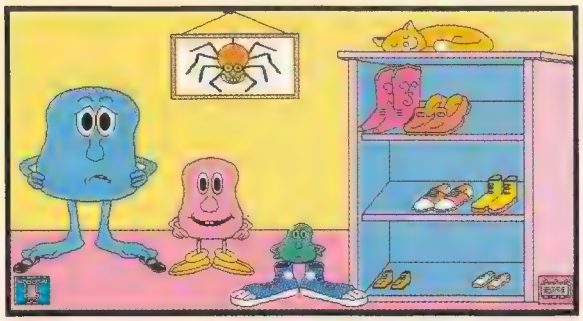
Software Sorcery, 6390 Greenwich Drive, Suite 180, San Diego, CA 92122



THE LEARNING GAME

EVERYTHING THAT RISES...

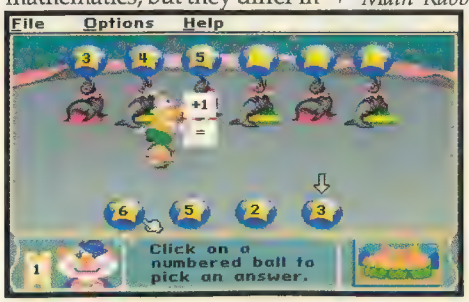
LESLIE EISER



Millie's Math House

Convergent and divergent describe two distinct approaches to education. In convergent learning, the student is presented a problem for which there is only one correct answer, while a divergent problem might have many correct solutions. Convergent learning emphasizes the answer, while divergent learning stresses the problem-solving process.

These methods can be seen at work in two hot new math programs aimed at roughly the same audience (ages 4 to 7 and 2 to 6). Both employ sophisticated graphics, digitized speech, and clever animated sequences to teach mathematics, but they differ in the *way* they teach. *Millie's Math House* from **EdMark** is a wonderful example of a divergent approach to mathematics, while **The Learning Company**'s *New! Math Rabbit* is an excellent implementation of the convergent method. Neither method is more successful at teaching mathematics than the other, but it's interesting to observe their differences — and similarities.

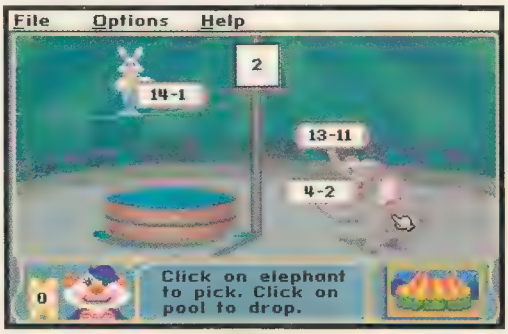


New! Math Rabbit

New! Math Rabbit

Convergent teaching, taken to its extreme, is often referred to as drill and practice. The child is presented with a series of problems to solve, and is rewarded for each correct answer. *New! Math Rabbit* offers re-wards in the form of animated sequences, and uses a friendly, attractive environment to hold the child's interest. With it's charming Circus motif and four different games, *New! Math Rabbit* keeps kids entertained as they practice math skills.

The Circus Calliope game is a good example of *New! Math Rabbit*'s combination of entertainment and convergent teaching. Instead of counting objects, the child counts notes on a musical scale, played on the cutest set of pipes this side of Kansas. There's also a pattern-recognition activity, plus two math problems, hidden in a sequence in which a sea lion juggles balls. By recognizing the same number written in different ways, your child will get to see Ellie the Acrobatic Elephant perform her tightrope show, and a Pop the Balloons midway game is really a mathematical version of Memory. Option menus in all four games allow the user to change the types of problems presented, and to increase game difficulty significantly.



New! Math Rabbit

One of the best things about *New! Math Rabbit* is its seamless fusion of solid learning and entertainment. The emphasis is still on drill and practice, but delightful characters throughout the program will keep your child focused and eager. Hilda Hippo winks as she swings by on her trapeze, Math Rabbit performs zany antics with each successful solution, and music plays continuously in the background. And with the successful completion of every activity, you earn a prize ticket that can be spent at the prize booth. These prizes are yours to keep (in the computer world, of course) and provide additional motivation for problem-solving.

The Learning Company, 6493 Kaiser Drive, Fremont CA 94555

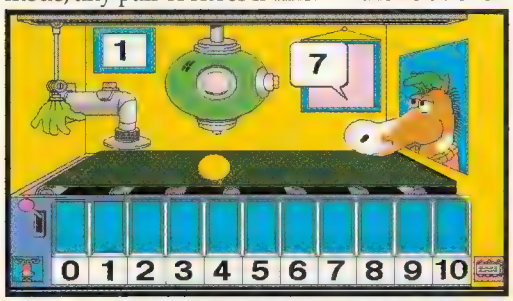
Millie's Math House

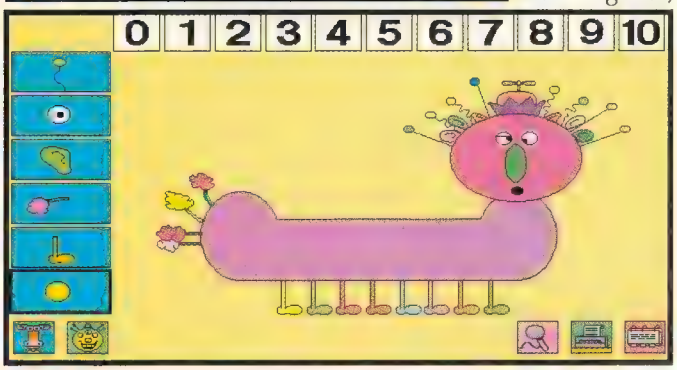
Divergent programs are much less goal-dependent than the activities in *New! Math Rabbit*. Presenting Explore and Discover environments, divergent learning games create situations in which any response is potentially correct. But because these environments are so free-form, adult observers might think a divergent product is pointless. After all, how can you learn anything if you never make mistakes? In truth, though, the divergent approach is a very powerful teach-

ing tool, as it encourages the child to explore his or her environment, and to develop independent problem-solving skills.

Of the six activities in *Millie's Math House* from EdMark, one employs only the divergent approach, while the other five offer both divergent and convergent modes. In each case, the divergent mode is the default. The user must deliberately choose to be tested — otherwise, the games are explore-and-discover activities.

Take the Shoe Box game, for example. Little, Middle, & Big live in the box, along with their cat. They desperately need shoes, and your child's task is to help each character pick the "right" pair of shoes from the closet. In divergent mode, any pair of shoes is fine.





Millie's Math House

You can watch Big squeeze his fat feet into the shoes meant for tiny Little, or see Little slip into boots that come up to his waist. The fit is obviously not perfect, but that's alright.

In the convergent mode, accessed by clicking the picture of a spider on the wall, only one of the three needs shoes, and your task is to find the one pair that fits. You can still give them the wrong shoes, but you're rewarded if you choose a pair that fits. A subtle difference to be sure, but very important from an educational standpoint.

Both *New! Math Rabbit* and *Millie's Math House* employ sophisticated graphics, digitized speech, and clever animated sequences to teach mathematics, but differ greatly in the *way* they teach.

Other games in *Millie's Math House* include Mouse House, a game involving geometric shapes; Bing & Bong, which teaches kids to recognize different patterns; and three different counting games — Build-A-Bug, the Number Machine, and the Cookie Factory. In each of these, youngsters explore the relationships between ordinal numbers (1,2,3) and counting objects (eyes, worms, jelly beans). In the exploration mode, youngsters build bugs, press keys on a cash register, or play with cookie dough and jelly beans. In drill-and-practice mode, the task is to pick out a given number of the objects. If the child makes a mistake, he is given a bit of help and encouraged to try again. Each successive error brings more help, until it's virtually impossible not to succeed.

One of the nicest things for parents in *Millie's Math House* is the Adult Information Notebook. This handy on-line guide contains suggestions about each game, plus insights from a professional educator on what to expect from your young-ster's play time with each game. There's even a series of Learning Goals defined for each activity.

EdMark Corporation, P.O. Box 3218, Redmond WA 98073

And For The Budding Artist...

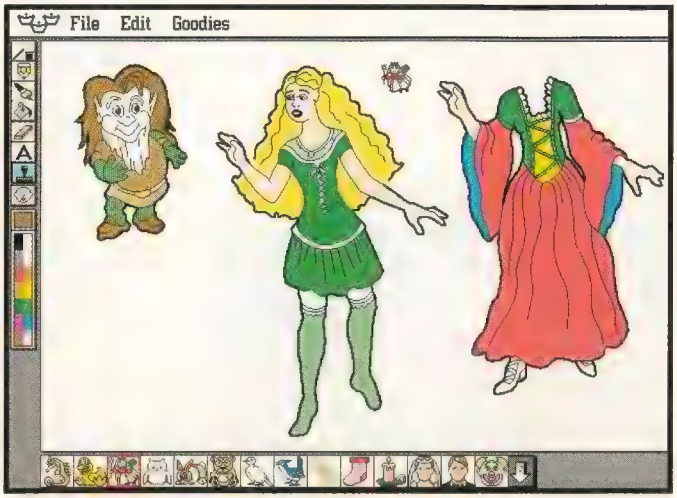
If you're looking for a truly divergent activity, check out *Kid-Cuts* from **Broderbund**. At first glance the product looks much like the popular *KidPix*, but *KidCuts* is really very different.

The concept is really neat: There are 36 different craft activities, allowing kids to make masks, jewelry, hats, and dolls. Each craft offers seven different interpretations of several basic shapes. For instance, a tiger-shaped mask (one of four mask shapes) can be decorated to look like a clown, a monster, and of course a tiger. Once the design is set, painting tools like those in *KidPix* can be used to draw on the mask, fill sections with different colors, or change details. A set of 112 stamps completes the tool kit.

Unfortunately, other craft groups offer less variety. The dolls were probably the most disappointing design. Only the faces on the two boy dolls and two girl dolls change, while their clothes stay the same. Once a prince, always a prince.

If you don't have a printer connected to your system, you won't be getting the most *KidCuts* has to offer. But with a printer (better yet, a color printer) the program is wonderful. It allows you to print out cards, notes, and all the crafts you and your child have created. And some of the best parts of *KidCuts* happen away from the computer, as you cut out all the puppets, masks, shapes, dolls, and puzzles you've made.

Broderbund, 500 Redwood Boulevard, Novato CA 94948



KidCuts

2 2 1 C

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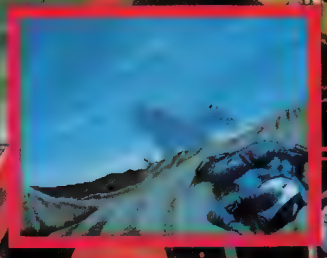


Screen shots shown are from the Amiga version of the game. Game program © 1992 Ocean Software Limited.

The name of the game

ocean

Ocean of America, Inc.
[illegible] Trade Zone
Suite D-102
San Jose, CA 95131

Product Information Number 100

REALMS OF ARKANIA: BLADE OF DESTINY

Category: Fantasy Role Playing

Publisher: Sir-tech Software

Developer: Attic Entertainment

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286, Hard Drive	386SX/20
640K RAM	Supported Sound Cards
DOS 3.0 or higher	Mouse
VGA	

NEIL RANDALL

Given the adherence to pencil-and-paper role-playing systems that has marked the *Wizardry* series (and especially *Crusaders of the Dark Savant*), it seems only natural that Sir-tech Software would pick up *Realms of Arkania*. Based on Germany's most popular pencil-and-paper game, *Das Schwarze Auge*, *Blade of Destiny* is the first installment in the *Arkania* series. It was released for the Amiga last year, and makes its PC debut with the Sir-tech release.

Blade of Destiny is set on the continent of Arkania, an area replete with towns, rivers, lakes, seas, mountains, forests — and creatures bent on your destruction. You start the game in the city of Thorwal, and your overall quest is to find the Blade of Destiny, which the leader of Thorwal claims is necessary to stop rampaging orcs (they're everywhere!) from destroying the countryside. Along the way, and true to the nature of traditional FRPs, you'll undertake sub-quests and find intriguing new areas to explore.

When you load *Destiny*, your first decision is whether to play in Novice or Advanced mode. Before defaulting to Advanced, as most experienced FRPers will do, read the manual carefully. Advanced doesn't mean the monsters will inflict more damage, or that the puzzles will be harder; instead, it means you have greater control over the precise nature of character advancement. In a solid design move, the game lets you switch from Novice to Advanced whenever you load the game, so if you save a game while in Novice you can exit, re-load, and choose Advanced if

IF YOUR IDEA OF A GOOD TIME

IS SITTING ALONE IN THE DARK,

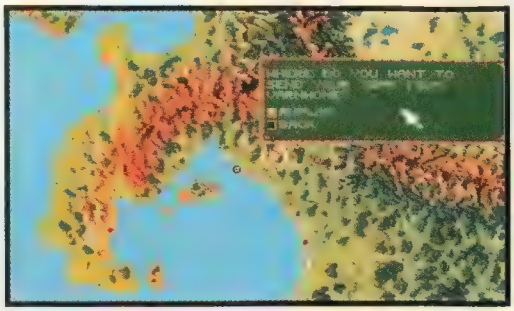
FIGHTING OFF EVIL FORCES

'TIL THE SUN COMES UP...

your characters are about to rise a level. Nice touch.

Character creation, while richly detailed, is an initially confusing process, although you can avoid it by accepting the default party of adventurers. To create a character, you go into the Generation program and click the right mouse button (not immediately obvious, by the way). This gives you a sub-menu, and in fact provides a good introduction to how the rest of the game works: In any situation, you can click on the right button to access a menu of actions.

Your task in character creation is to decide how many points to allot to which attributes, and then to select an "archetype" for your character. Archetype is a hybrid term merging what, in most FRPs, would be called races and professions. You can select, for example, a Dwarf, Thorwalian (i.e., human), or Green Elf, which are usually considered races; or Warlock, Druid, or Jester, usually termed professions. It should probably be mentioned that the feminine versions of some character types are inappropriately sexist (we don't use "authoress" or "comedienne" any more, so why "she-rogue" or "magicienne?"), but fortunately there are no differences in strength or performance between the two genders.



What makes *Destiny* immediately attractive is its inclusion of negative character traits. Not only do you give your characters a value for courage, wisdom, charisma, intuition, and other common FRP attributes, you must also assign them values for up to seven less savory traits. These include superstition, acrophobia, claustrophobia, avarice, necrophobia, curiosity, and violent temper. In another good design move, the game not only includes these attributes but actually makes use of them. A character with a high necrophobic value, for example, might flee a

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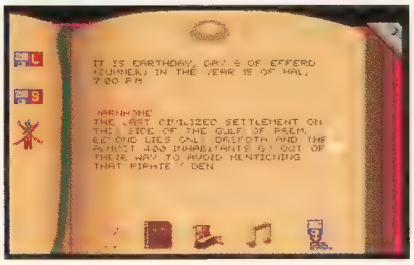
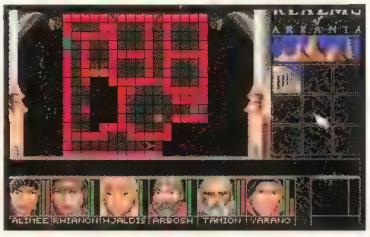
Product Information Number 216

battle against undead creatures, while highly superstitious characters are more likely to be affected by certain kinds of magic. Of course, why any claustrophic person would join a group of people who think dungeon-crawling is a good time boggles the mind, but psychology wasn't such an advanced science in medieval times.

If you're creating a party member in Advanced mode, you'll have even more control over character generation. In fact, the amount of control might be a bit daunting for first-time players. While Advanced mode closely simulates the experience of full character creation in paper-and-pencil role-playing games and allows you to tailor your characters more precisely, most people aren't likely to find the effort worthwhile. The computer handles the job just fine.



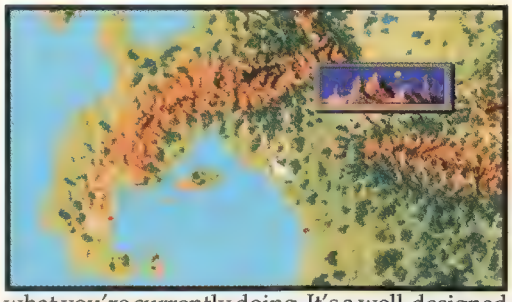
The first-person view of the action presented in the main screen boasts very strong graphics. Cobbles, bricks, stone, and other details line the streets of towns, and all add to the feel of the medieval villages. As with many FRPs, however, everything is positioned according to a rigid grid of squares — a fact that decreases realism, because things just aren't that way in the real world. The other problem, and again common to FRPs, is that after a while all locations start looking the same. But given these restrictions of the genre, the graphics work well.



You won't see any people on the streets, even though you'll walk right into many — a fact that renders the idea of first-person perspective almost pointless. Being ambushed by seven orcs when you bash your way into a dungeon chamber is understandable, but a surprise attack by three monsters in a straight hallway simply makes no sense. This is another common FRP problem (with some notable exceptions), and it's time to lobby all FRP designers to solve it: If we're given a first-person perspective, then allow us to see what's going on around us.

Below the main view screen you'll see the characters in your party. Single-click on one of them to move him to a different position in the party (only the first member performs tasks such as picking locks), or double-click to bring up the character review screen. From this screen you can equip your character, use items, trade items with other party members, and satisfy thirst and hunger.

You can use either the mouse or the arrow keys to move your party, and you can check your position in either towns or dungeons (as long as you have a light source) by clicking on the map icon to the right of the main view screen. Icons for encamping, casting spells, and other activities are also available, and change depending on what you're currently doing. It's a well-designed command system, and well worth the effort to learn.



Blade of Destiny is being marketed as a less exacting role-playing experience than, say, *Crusaders of the Dark Savant*. But it's certainly not an entry-level role-playing title, either. As the game begins, for example, the novice player is almost certain to wander aimlessly around Thorwal, because there doesn't seem to be anything else to do. Eventually you'll find yourself in one of several taverns (the town isn't big enough to support its huge service economy!), and learn that a citizen is looking for a party of adventurers. When you finally find that person, you're off and running — but even then it's far from apparent what you're supposed to be doing. *Destiny* is guilty of the classic FRP sin of expecting you to spend hours searching for an adventure!

It's not really a novice-level game for another reason: Character advancement is tough to achieve, and it's possible novice gamers will give up well before their characters reach Level 2. This isn't to say that difficult advancement is a bad design decision. It's simply more acceptable to an experienced player, who might be more willing to work toward that important goal.

Another strong design choice, but one that might be tough on beginners, is the decision to penalize players who save their games anywhere other than temples. This prevents the habit of saving immediately before entering a dangerous situation. The penalty: the loss of 50 experience points per character.

All told, *Blade of Destiny* is a solid next-step for the gamer looking to hone those developing FRP skills. It rewards you with interesting quests and a big, well-designed world. Battles *are* overly long (but not as frequent as some other titles), and the interaction of character traits with gameplay is fascinating to discover. Future installments would do well to break through some of the standard FRP cliches, but as it stands this game is well worth the required investment of both money and time.

Sir-tech, Ogdensburg Business Center, P.O. Box 245, Ogdensburg NY 13669

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MIGHT AND MAGIC: DARKSIDE OF XEEN

Category: Fantasy Role Playing

Publisher: New World Computing

Developer: New World Computing

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286	386/16MHz
2 MB RAM	DOS 5.0 Or Higher, Or Memory Manager
15 MB Hard Drive Space	Sound Blaster
DOS 3.3	Or Compatibles, General MIDI, Roland
VGA	

BERNIE YEE

In its heyday, *Might and Magic III: Isles of Terra*, from New World Computing, was a brilliant fantasy role-playing game. It sported many features that are now considered essential to a good FRP — automapping, above- and below-ground exploration with a first-person perspective, impressive lists of items, spells, and monsters, and a huge world to explore. It set new standards in more way than one.

Isles of Terra was followed by *Might & Magic: Clouds of Xeen* and now, *Might & Magic: DarkSide of Xeen*. Both games are an evolutionary refinement of the original award-winning *Might & Magic III*, rather than vehicles that introduce a new gaming system. Combine the two on your hard drive, though, and you end up with the *World of Xeen*, a sprawling game universe that offers you more things to do than in a typical work day. *World of Xeen* has an ending distinct from *Clouds* and *DarkSide*, as you wrap up unfinished business between Corak and your old *Might & Magic III* nemesis, Sheltem. *DarkSide* has a few improvements over its cousin *Clouds*, but except for the fact that *DarkSide* is decidedly bigger and tougher, the two are nearly identical.

Veterans of a previous Might & Magic adventures will feel at ease coming over to the *DarkSide*, which can be played as a standalone game or as *Worlds of Xeen*. If you choose to create the *World of Xeen*, transport pyramids will zap you back and forth between the two worlds. *DarkSide of Xeen* has many well-appointed role-playing tools to make your stay a fun one:

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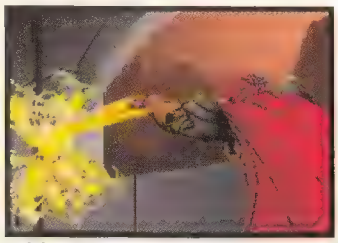
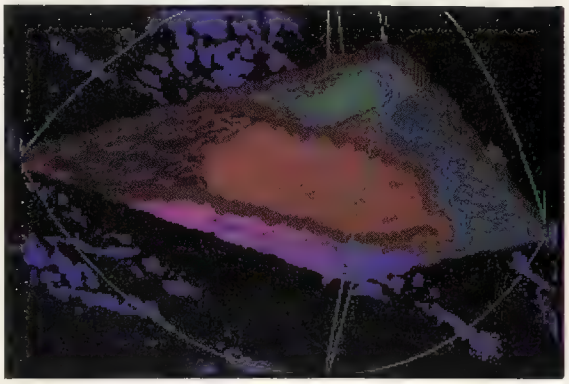


Automapping, a Notepad for recording important facts, and a quests checklist keep crusaders organized as well as brave — the sort of features that let you set aside mundane tasks and concentrate on the job at hand.

DarkSide of Xeen has the unmistakable atmosphere of a New World Computing product. The game world is huge, full of free (almost) experience points, lavish amounts of gold, magic wells which can boost your status to godlike abilities, and hoards of monsters just waiting for you to dismember them. I liken *Xeen* to Westworld, the robotic amusement park where everything is geared towards entertaining the visitors.

On the *DarkSide of Xeen*, no one lives out their normal lives independently; everyone exists to help or hinder your brave party of six. As the plot unfolds, there's lots of combat, but relatively little interaction with non-player characters. As a result, you sometimes feel a bit lonely and removed, as though your actions won't really affect the final outcome the story. This feeling is exacerbated by the fact that the only creatures you see walking around outside are monsters.



When you do find someone to talk to indoors, you still don't get the feeling that you're in a vibrant, fluid world. In the bar, for example, you can click on an empty chair to talk to its occupant, and wind up carrying on a one-sided conversation that does nothing to give you the sense of changing, growing relationships with non-player characters. Gamers might not want a world as realistic as the Ultima series — where they can go out and harvest wheat, make it into flour, and bake bread — but undoubtedly some want a little more realism than scores of magic wells that boost your abilities at the drop of a hat.

Still, many players will revel in the pure escapism and fun of the *DarkSide* world. The 256-color graphics are richly detailed, if a bit cartoonish, and incorporate some humorous touches — the pained expressions on the faces of the critters you're beating mercilessly, and the

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*Actual Amazon VGA screens

Product Information Number 101

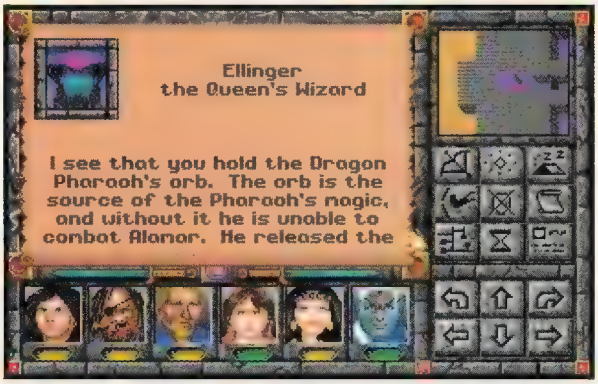
way your characters' portraits which line the bottom of the screen change to reflect their condition, whether insane, poisoned, or ill.

But the real attention grabber is what hopefully will be a new trend — support of General MIDI and/or Creative Labs' WaveBlaster, allowing the game to use wavetable boards to create music. The quality of wavetable music (sampled from real instruments) is exceptional, and greatly improves the ambience of hacking a barbarian to pieces. *DarkSide* did lock up from time to time when I used the WaveBlaster option; this might have had something to do with the software driver or the card itself, so if you have problems check with Creative Labs and New World. It's worth the effort, because with the wavetable music *DarkSide of Xeen* becomes a true multimedia experience.

An elaborate introductory sequence shows that Alamar (the big bad fella) has somehow stolen an artifact of power and has convinced a number of non-human forces to join him in subverting the DarkSide of Xeen. To foil Alamar, it's up to your party to rescue the good dragon pharaoh and reach the imprisoned queen. Needless to say, you must complete a number of quests along the way. There are numerous tiny side-quests which may not be essential to completing the game, but which can be beneficial in terms of experience and magic items.

Game play is familiar and intuitive. Your party begins in the town of Castleview, which,

like every Might & Magic town, is plagued by various ills such as gremlins and goblins running amok. Castleview is basically designed to get your characters to about the 11th level of experience, so they don't get beaten to a pulp when they venture outside. After Castleview, your characters can go where they like, though certain areas contain creatures which are too powerful for your heroes if you meet them early on. Although the engine is the same move-ten-feet-turn-90-degrees system made obsolete by the smoothly scrolling movement of *Ultima Underworld*, the graphics are still rich and colorful, and several animations with digitized speech help spice up your travels. The interface — an icon-based point-and-click affair — is very easy to use, and though the phased combat system lacks some of the tactical complexity of a game like Dynamix's *Betrayal at Krondor*, it still works quite well. The magic system is very similar to *Might & Magic III*, relying on a combination of spell points and gems to fuel enchantments. The effects of both

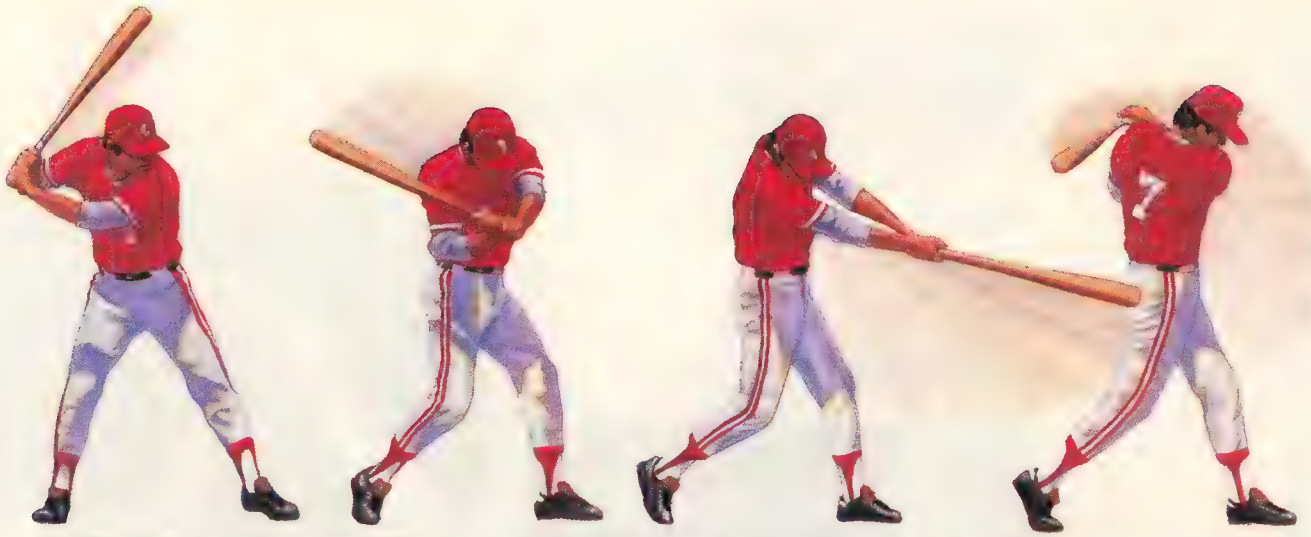

Ellinger
the Queen's Wizard
I see that you hold the Dragon Pharaoh's orb. The orb is the source of the Pharaoh's magic, and without it he is unable to combat Alamar. He released the

spells and combat are graphically illustrated, with spiraling fireballs igniting hapless foes and arrows flying through the air.

The final showdown with Alamar in *DarkSide* takes place with a familiar friend from earlier games in the Might & Magic series. And if you're playing *World of Xeen*, the game doesn't end there — the dragon pharaoh sends you into the towers in *Clouds of Xeen* (which you can't enter until you complete *DarkSide*) for a final series of adventures that will complete the reunification of the two worlds. It makes for a third endgame, and gives the package good replay value for players who own *Clouds*.

I was recently asked why I considered *Might & Magic III* the best FRP the year it was released, but now rate *DarkSide of Xeen* — a polished, refined, and prettier version of the *Might & Magic III* engine — only above-average. One look at the competition provides the answer: Other designers have caught up, and what was state-of-the-art yesterday is only average today...and dated tomorrow. Nonetheless, *DarkSide of Xeen*, especially when combined with *Clouds of Xeen*, is just the ticket for adventurers eager to immerse themselves in a huge, colorful fantasy world that's chock-full of nasties to kill and treasures to plunder. And even as we speak, the wizards at New World are busy brewing up a true 3-D fantasy game that could place Might & Magic back at the forefront of the genre.

New World Computing, 20301 Ventura Boulevard, Suite 200, Woodland Hills, CA 91364



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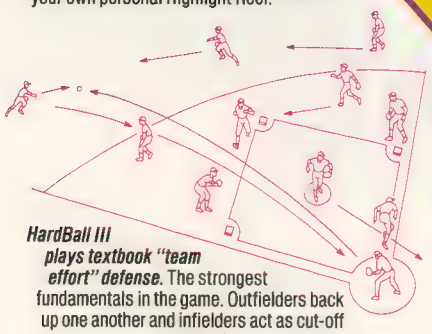

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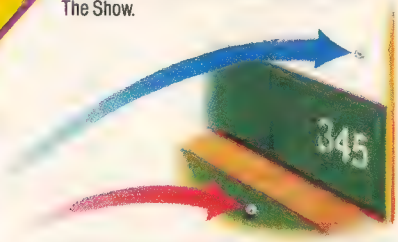

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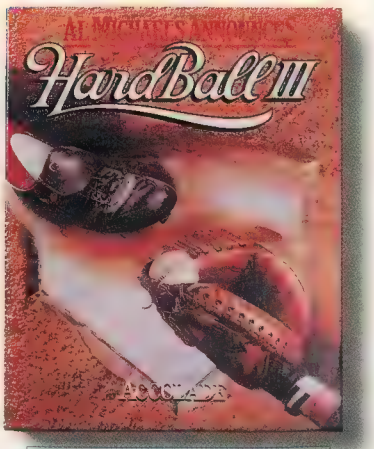

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Product Information Number 128

THE LEGACY: REALM OF TERROR

Category: Horror Role-Playing

Publisher: MicroProse

Developer: MicroProse

Rating:

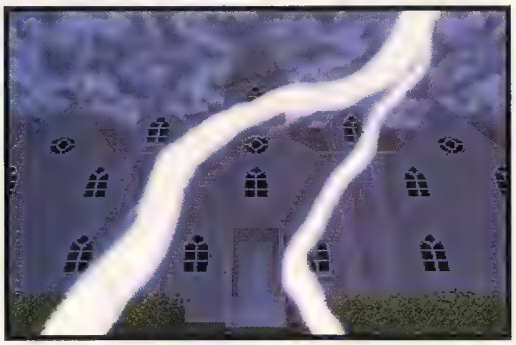
REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386/16	386/33
2 MB RAM	25 MB Hard Drive
16 MB Hard Drive	Sound Card With DAC
DOS 5.0 Or Higher, Or Memory Manager	Mouse
VGA	

BERNIE YEE

Computer role-playing game designers have rediscovered the fertile ground sown by writers like Poe and Lovecraft, and as a result gamers are coming home to houses haunted by unspeakable evil, and terrors from other dimensions. Infogrames' *Alone in the Dark* and Trilobyte's *The 7th Guest* led the way into this fruitful genre, but fast behind them comes *The Legacy: Realm of Terror*, developed by MicroProse's U.K. division. Though not revolutionary, *Legacy* is undeniably a solid game with good — sometimes excellent — production values.

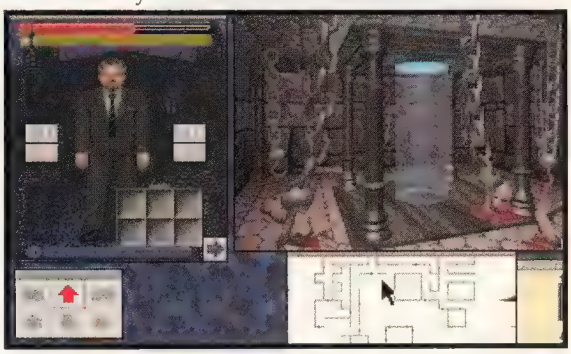
You begin the game by choosing to play as one of several male or female characters, each with unique strengths. Whatever your choice, you're the last in a family line, and you've inherited the nightmarish, cursed home of your ancestors. Your job is to rid your bloodline, and the house, of an unknown Lovecraftian horror.

And conquering your Legacy is no simple matter. The horrors that will confront you —



oozing zombies, spirits, winged demons, and a macabre but amusing shotgun-toting ghoul — are no easy targets. Although you soon discover weapons, armor, and magic, your best tactic throughout the game is often to run away from these fiends.

Legacy's graphics are excellent, and almost photo-realistic in a *7th Guest* sort of way; indeed, they look as though they were rendered with Autodesk or some other CAD software. But the realism created by the graphics is dampened somewhat by the "move-ten-feet-at-a-time" manner in

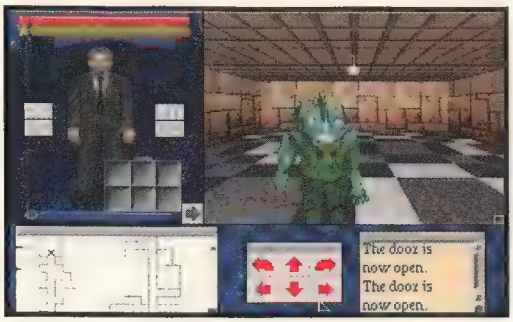


which you roam the house, reminiscent of games such as *Eye of the Beholder*. However, the unholy creatures you face *do* move smoothly against the wall sets — you can see them shambling toward you in the distance, attracted to the warm blood flowing through your veins.

Legacy employs a windowing interface, with a first-person point-of-view display above a continuously updated automap. One nice touch is that the viewing, automap, and text displays can be resized and moved anywhere on the screen. You point and click to perform various actions, such as casting spells, aiming a weapon, or opening your attaché case. Similarly, you can drag and drop various items in your inventory, or toss them on the floor, where they remain until you retrieve them.

There's a moody musical score, and digitized sound effects of moaning demons and creaking doors. Scenes of *Elvira*-esque gore are sprinkled through the house, such as the dumbwaiter which opens to reveal a dismembered head.

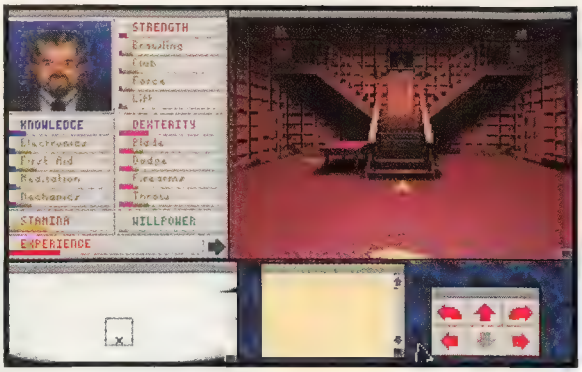
Combat takes place in real time, and more often than not is nasty, brutish, and short. You can aim gunshots at various parts of the rotting corpses that seem to be the main inhabitants of the old house, but ammunition is limited, and many of the



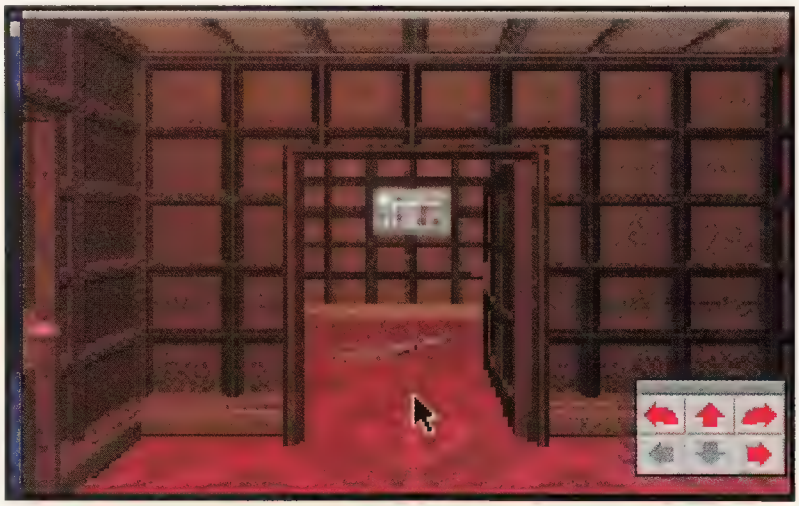
critters you face are quite tough. Some of the characters you can choose as your hero/heroine can cast spells; others might be better suited for physical combat; still others possess medical skills, something you'll use often.

The characters are each rated in four different attributes (knowledge, strength, dexterity, and willpower; the last determines how many spells your character can learn) and a number of skills (electronics, first aid, brawling, club, dodge, firearms, etc.). You can create your own character by re-allocating points in each category. Magic is always good to have, so I picked a pre-rolled spellcaster. The magic system is pretty straightforward, with an on-line spellbook listing the effects of the relatively few available spells. But I found the effects of magic puzzling at times; despite girding my character with Kevlar armor, darting into the hallway, and casting multiple fireball spells at the shotgun-toting ghoul, I couldn't get him to go down. So I emptied a clip or two of revolver bullets into him — still no go.

It's just one example of how challenging *Legacy* can be, despite the automap and other interface niceties. Combat is tough, and *very* often discretion is the better part of valor. What's more, the mansion is *huge*, requiring you to trek around quite a bit looking for objects to solve puzzles. The system for manipulating inventory items is also a bit unwieldy. There are only four inventory slots available, which means you'll need a briefcase or bag to hold many important objects — and you *must* carry the briefcase or bag in one of your hands. So for almost the entire game you've got only one hand to make quick and effective use of weapons, talismans, or shields. And switching weapons during combat can cost time and damage.



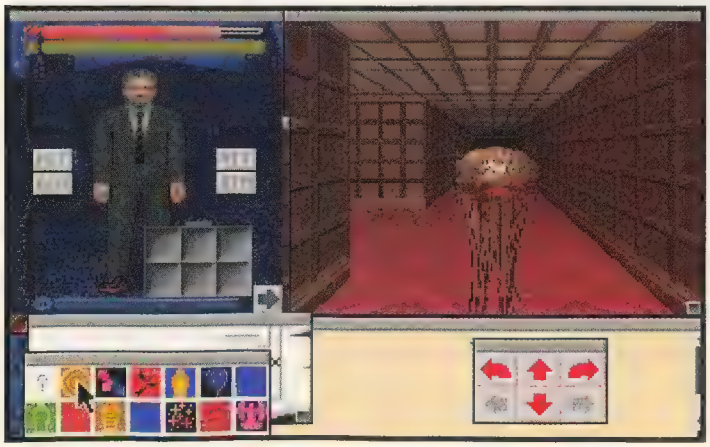
Several aspects of the game are testimony to the fact that our friends across the ocean approach game design much differently than U.S. developers. *Legacy* can be pretty frustrating at times, even for seasoned RPG veterans. The layout of the mansion is extremely daunting, especially with the number of fiends out for your blood. There are far too many fatal encounters, and your own powers of self-preservation — healing, magic, combat skills, and defensive abilities — are meager indeed. Contrast *Legacy*'s many lethal traps, such as the pools of blood which inflict *lots* of damage if not avoided,



with a game like Dynamix's *Betrayal at Krondor*, where your party has to work pretty hard before it's completely wiped out. You also won't find a lot of interaction in *Legacy* — though that may be due in part to the fact that zombies have poor interpersonal skills.

But the graphics and, most impressively, the macabre atmosphere make playing *Legacy* an often compelling experience. The sight of a dim figure in the distance, wafting up to you and identifying itself as a trapped spirit, urges you to explore this strange, deadly world.

If game play were more balanced, *Legacy* would be a winner. As it stands, though, *The Legacy: Realm of Terror* is still a very solid entry in the nascent world of horror role-playing.



MicroProse, 180 Lakefront Drive, Hunt Valley, MD 21030

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER III: ASSAULT ON MYTH DRANNOR

Category: Fantasy Role-Playing

Publisher: Strategic Simulations, Inc.

Developer: Strategic Simulations, Inc.

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386 Or Better	2 MB RAM
640K	Supported Sound Card
VGA	
Mouse	

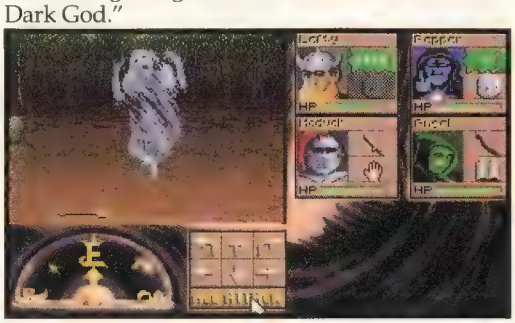
T. LIAM MCDONALD

This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.

So said cranky old poet T.S. Eliot and, sadly, so says this cranky reviewer after far too many hours with *Eye of the Beholder III: Assault on Myth Drannor* from SSI. What was a ground-breaking game in the first installment and state-of-the-art in the second has, at the last, fizzled to incompetence with only an occasional flash of inspiration. Maybe if it didn't have to measure up to Westwood Studios' superior *Eye 1* and *2* designs; maybe if we hadn't already been dazzled by *Ultima Underworld*. Maybe....

Eye of the Beholder was the original first person role-playing adventure for the PC. Offering quite a change from the other Advanced Dungeons and Dragons games developed by SSI from their TSR license, the first and second games in the series became immense hits. Instead of viewing the action from above, you had gorgeous graphics displaying the action as if through the adventurers' eyes. Eventually, the incremental movement displayed through the viewing window—you moved a pre-determined distance with each click of the mouse—was surpassed by the smooth flowing 3-D perspectives of *Ultima Underworld* and *Wolfenstein 3-D*, and the *Eye* design was no longer cutting edge. But in its time, it was a classic.

The storyline for *Eye 3* is woefully thin, even for a dungeon crawl: Hot on the heels of trashing Dran Draggore in *Eye 2*, your party is approached by a stranger before they even have a chance to finish their first beer. This stranger whisks the party to the abandoned realm of Myth Drannor. Once a fairly pleasant place to pitch a tent, Myth Drannor has fallen upon hard times, and has pretty much gone to hell in a handbasket. A mysterious "lich" exerts an evil influence over the whole place. This lich is so deadly and awful that the designers didn't even bother to give him a name, but as the game goes on, he is referred to as "The Dark God."



This is the story *in toto*, without logic or depth, and apparently we're supposed to be so pumped up about it that we'll overcome hoards of monsters over hours and hours of interminable game play to see it through. Slash-and-hack episodes are occasionally punctuated by long, rambling, totally irrelevant narratives about Myth Drannor that are certain to have you clicking the "OK" button without even reading for clues (there aren't any, by the way). *Eye 2*, while no *Canterbury Tales* in the plot department, at least maintained the menace of Dran and his evil machinations throughout the entire adventure. No such luck with *Eye 3*.

The Dark God resides high in the Temple of Lathander, protected by Shadow Hounds and Death Knights. You start a long way from there, in a rather uninspired section of woods inhabited by Grave Mists. These are dispatched without much ado, and then it's on to either the Warriors' Tomb, or The Forest Trail and Guildhall Quarter Ruins. The Warriors' Tomb — lifted, as are many of the locations in the game, straight from *Eye 2* — is inhabited by gaggles of Swordwraths and Undead Beasts, so it's best to put off a trip there until you've accrued more experience points. The Forest Trail, on the other hand, is home to a tangle of "bramble thorn passages" that spin you in endless circles before depositing you in the Guildhall Quarter Ruins. Chimeras and hags are there to vex you, but you won't find any real puzzles until you wind up in the Mages Guild.

The puzzles are generally in the form of multiple transporters, switches, and levers. Sometimes there are clues offered in books found along the

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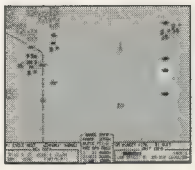

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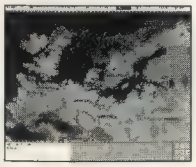

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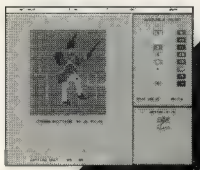

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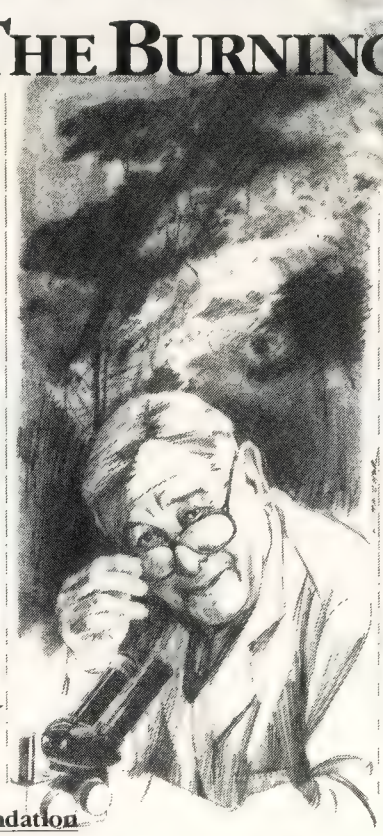

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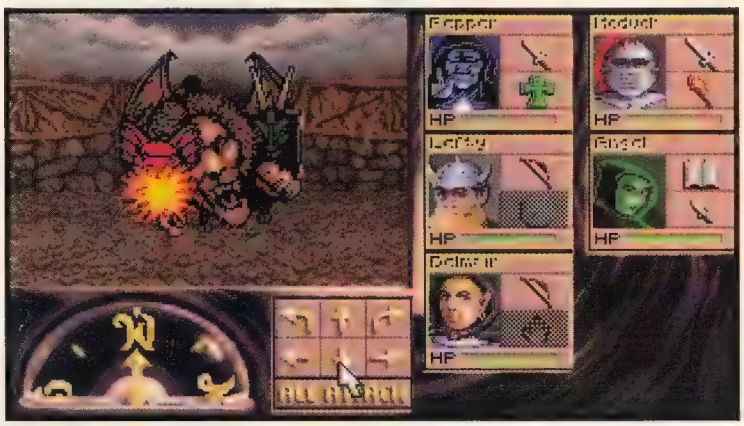
way, but solving them is usually a matter of trial and error, more error, and still more error. Things don't get fresh and interesting until about 20 hours into the game, at the Mages Guild, which is entirely underwater. This setting makes possible one of the few unique elements of the game — the bubble that's released when you use your Helm of Underwater breathing and other lifesaving spells — but even this is plagued by random "no manna" zones that make spells fizzle. After this escapade there are the four levels of the Temple of Lathander and the final encounter wtih the Dark God, and that's about it.

In the course of all this combat you'll come across four monsters new to AD&D games: grave mists, living muck, ogre slugs, and shadow hounds. Of these, only the living muck, which dissolves metal weapons, is a problem; the rest fall like wheat before the scythe of experienced warriors. Combat is based in real time, which means mouse and keyboard dexterity is a must.

One new design element vastly improves the original *Eyes*' combat system. An option called "All Attack" allows for any combination of selected adventurers to strike *simultaneously*. In the past, they only struck as fast as you could get the mouse to the next strike button. Only weapons are affected by this enhancement; spells still have to be launched individually. The "Beholder Two-Step" — a tactic developed by *Eye* veterans in which you strike with the mouse and move out of the way with the keyboard — is still essential to survival.

The programming itself is seriously flawed. Even on a fairly fast machine (386/40), long delays mark each new game or restored save game, and just before a monster appears on the scene there's a pause as the computer reads from the disk; for a game that's graphically inferior to its predecessor, this is unconscionable. And after launching a spell, there's also about a two-second pause during which *nothing* can be done. Considering that the "Two-Step" is necessary for even rudimentary combat, this delay creates all kinds of problems. I often found myself unwittingly stepping aside or turning round two and three times because the computer was still processing my keystrokes.

I still remember hearing the drip of water and scuttling of spider legs in the dungeons of *Eye 2*: It was a breakout moment in computer games, with rich sound design and evocative graphics combining to create a world in which the gamer could become totally immersed. There are no such moments in *Eye 3*, where both sound design and graphics are far from the quality of the previous version. In fact, the only real graphical standouts in *Eye 3* are the locations taken straight from *Eye 2*! New locations, such as the Guildhall Quarter Ruins, are so dim and poorly rendered as to be almost impenetrable, and graphics on the whole are pale imitations of the slick artwork of the first two games. While *Eye 2* featured a dazzling array of designs for the various levels of the temple, *Eye 3* offers nothing new or interesting. And the sound! *Eye 3*'s sound design is so flat, scratchy, ineptly executed, and downright annoying that you might as well play it in total silence.



Eye of the Beholder III is indeed a disappointment, due largely to the absence of the skilled Westwood Studios design team; nothing else can account for the poor quality of this game. Graphically and aurally it's a disaster, the story is nonexistent, the variety of locations is pitiful, and the technical quality poor. A series as noteworthy as *Eye of the Beholder* deserved far better than this sad swan song.

MANIAC MANSION 2: DAY OF THE TENTACLE (CD-ROM VERSION)

Category: Graphic Adventure

Publisher: LucasArts

Developer: LucasArts

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
CD-ROM drive	Double-speed CD-ROM drive
MSCDEX 2.1 or higher	386/40 or higher
286, Hard Drive	Supported Sound Cards
2 meg RAM	Mouse
VGA	

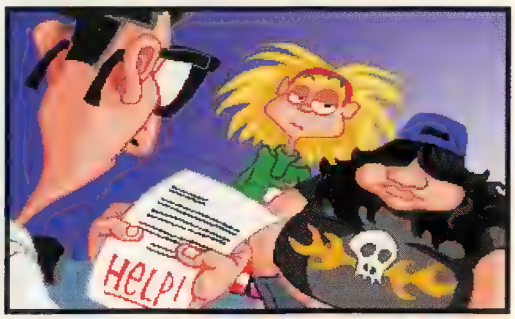
MATTHEW A. FIRME

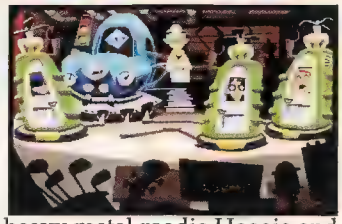
Considering the incredible success of the original *Maniac Mansion*, it's hardly surprising LucasArts is releasing a sequel. The only surprising part is that they've waited so long.

Maniac Mansion introduced us to the wacked-out Edison clan, a family so comically twisted, they even surfaced in their own syndicated sitcom. In *Day of the Tentacle*, we meet the Edison's again. And again. And again. Thanks to a bit of time-travel, you'll run into Edisons from the past, present, and future!

In case you didn't get to play the original *Maniac Mansion*, all you have to do is go upstairs to Weird Ed Edison's room and use his computer. You'll find a working copy of *Maniac Mansion*, complete with exciting EGA graphics. It's still a great game, and its inclusion adds real value to this package. Spend a few moments with this title, then exit back into the world of the new game, and you'll really gain an appreciation for modern technology!

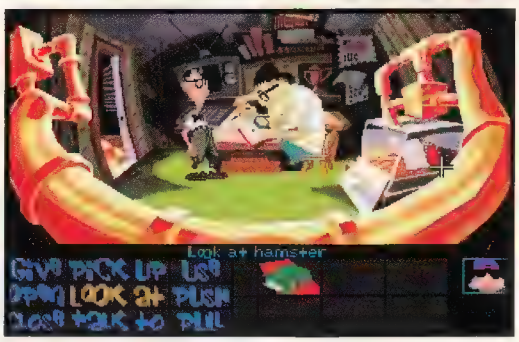
Day of the Tentacle begins in the home of Bernard Bernoulli, brainy veteran of the first *Maniac Mansion*. A hamster knocks at Bernard's door bearing a message: Green Tentacle, one of





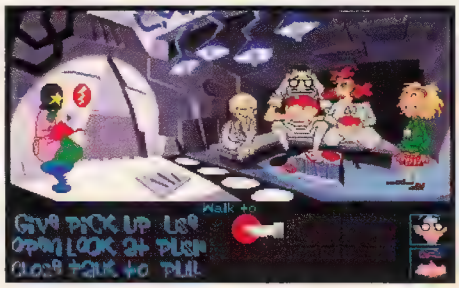
Dr. Fred Edison's creations and a friend of Bernard, is in trouble. So Bernard and his kooky roommates — tubby heavy metal roadie Hoagie and spacey med-school student Laverne — rush off to Maniac Mansion to free Green Tentacle from Dr. Fred.

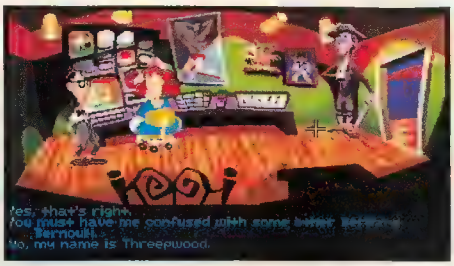
What our three heros *don't* know is that Green Tentacle is being held with Purple Tentacle, who's sipped toxic waste, grown arms, and



become an evil genius bent on world domination. So when both Green and Purple are set free, the very future of mankind is in jeopardy. Now Bernard, Hoagie, and Laverne must help Dr. Fred get Purple Tentacle back by jumping in Dr. Fred's Chron-o-John time machines and going back in time 24 hours to prevent Purple Tentacle from escaping.

Of course, the Chron-o-Johns don't work with the precision everyone had hoped for, and Bernard lands back in the present, Hoagie is whisked 200 years into the past, and Laverne 200 years into the future. And so you must figure out





how to unite the three friends in time, and then go get that evil Tentacle!

The box copy refers to *Day of the Tentacle* as "A cartoon adventure," and you couldn't come up with a more apt description. The colorful, detailed, playful look of the game brings to mind the best work of Chuck Jones or Tex Avery. And on a fast machine, the frame rate is better than most of the children's cartoons around today.

As good as this animation is, the music and voice are even better — and just as delightfully cartoonish. *Day of the Tentacle* boasts some of the best voice acting in any game. Richard Sanders, best known as *WKRP in Cincinnati*'s Les Nessman, is especially good. His delivery as the bookish Bernard is dead-on, and his familiar voice will make *WKRP* fans everywhere warm to the game almost immediately.

The supporting characters are also excellent. George Washington sounds quite a bit like Jim Backus, and there's a hint of Woody Allen in John Hancock. Purple Tentacle has a deliciously evil voice, and Dr. Fred is the perfect crotchety, mad scientist. Only Laverne, whose ditzy airhead routine can wear pretty thin, fails to add to the product.

But Hoagie steals the show. As soon as you can, walk him up to the second floor of the old mansion to meet Betsy Ross. His ideas on creating a flag for the fledgling United States will have you rolling in the floor ("What if it had the face of the devil on it, with like red, white, and blue flames coming out of his mouth?"), and they're delivered in a hysterical mix of Texas drawl and California Valley Speak.

Keep in mind that I'm reviewing the CD-ROM version of *Day of the Tentacle*. There's a disk-based version, but it lacks the voice-overs so vital to the game's cartoon feel. In fact, this is one of the few games I've played in which voice actually adds to the product. In many cases, I just turn the voice off. But in *Day of the Tentacle*, it's a delight all the time.

The game itself is a lot of fun, although not the toughest graphic adventure out there. Anyone familiar with LucasArts' past products will feel immediately comfortable with *Day of the Tentacle*. You can (and must) play as all three characters, alternating among the very different worlds of past, present, and future. You "flush" important items from past to present to future in the Chron-o-Johns. This means you're constantly flushing important items down the commode, or reaching into a toilet bowl for those last-minute necessities. And how can you not enjoy fun like that?

While decidedly zany, the game's tightly woven story line is never nonsensical. Even when you're entering a mummy in a pet show or painting a kumquat tree red, there's a definite method to your madness and a reasonable clue to lead you to a given action. Very few of the game's many puzzles are trial and error affairs, depending instead on the story's own cartoon-based logic. Anyone who's played a graphic adventure loaded with "leap of faith" puzzles will appreciate the thought that went into this one.

The CD-ROM version of *Day of the Tentacle* is sure to be one of those titles CD-ROM owners will use to persuade dubious spouses that the new PC hardware they just bought really is worth the money. It magnificently unites voice and animation to create a top-drawer game that's as much fun to play as it is to watch. ▽

LucasArts, P.O. Box 10307, San Rafael CA 94912

BUZZ ALDRIN'S RACE INTO SPACE

Category: Strategy

Publisher: Interplay

Developer: Strategic Visions

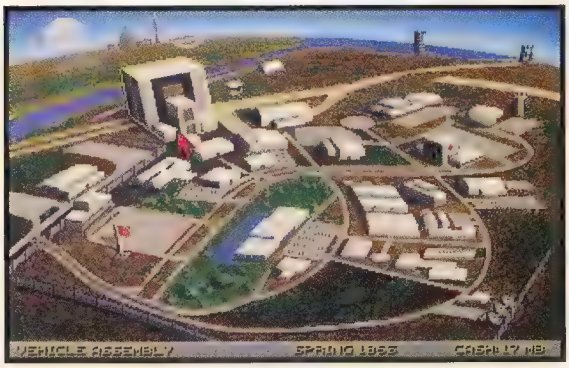
Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286/12, Hard Drive 640K RAM VGA/MCGA	Supported Sound Cards Mouse

TIM VICTOR

When Interplay announced *Buzz Aldrin's Race Into Space* in late 1991, this grand simulation of the U.S.-Soviet race to the moon seemed to hold great promise. Players would choose a strategy for reaching the moon, recruit and train astronauts, and schedule space flights, selecting the equipment and crew for each launch. Further, missions would feature digitized footage from actual space flights. Now, nearly a year after its originally planned ship date, *Race Into Space* is finally on store shelves. But some serious playability problems prevent it from achieving liftoff.

The basic mechanics of *Race Into Space* turned out fine. The program runs smoothly even on a 286, and the standard VGA screens are attractive and easy to read. The scope of the game is admirable, encompassing 57 different mission plans and including all the major rockets and vehicles used by both space programs. There are even interesting alternatives — including a four-man capsule, a mini-shuttle, and the aborted Nova super-booster — that permit plausible non-historical scenarios in addition to the Lunar-Orbit Rendezvous plan that actually reached the moon.



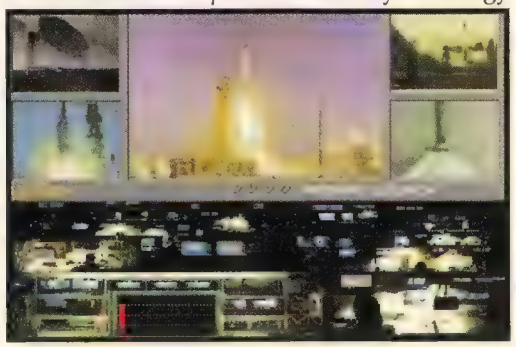
But the game has one major problem: it's simply too hard to play. Though decidedly complex, *Race Into Space* lacks the gradual learning curve that makes a complex game enjoyable rather than frustrating. And there's no option for a streamlined game which might make it easier for beginners to learn through experimentation.

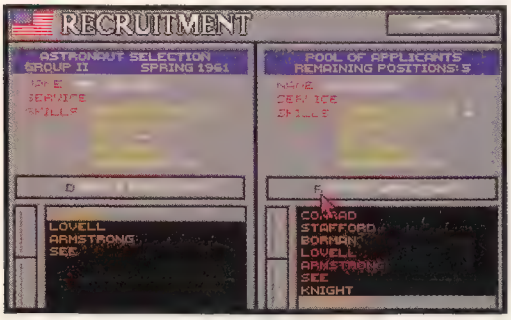
You can play *Race Into Space* against a human or computer opponent. There are three levels of difficulty for both players, but even with the maximum handicap applied to the computer opponent, the single-player game is just too difficult. What's more, there's no way to watch the computer's strategy during play, or even to review it when the game has ended. It's pretty demoralizing to lose to a superior rival without a chance to learn from the experience.

A better manual would go a long way toward alleviating this problem. The game really needs a step-by-step tutorial, walking the player through several turns, as well as better explanations of game strategy and mission planning. While the manual shows each game screen and describes the function of each button and control, it leaves a lot of unanswered questions about actual game play.

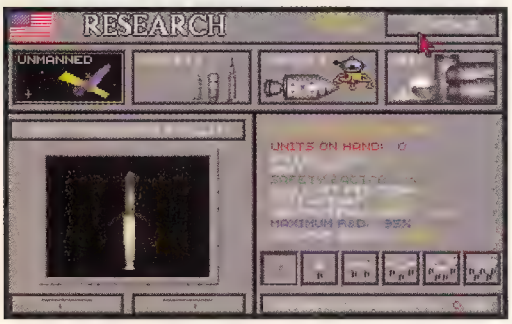
The video clips in *Race Into Space* are fun to watch at first, but they don't add much to the game. They're only shown during space flights, after a player has entered all of his or her plans for a turn, or season, which represents six months of calendar time. During this phase of the game there's nothing to do except watch the screen, waiting for the outcome of the missions, and in all honesty the film footage simply lengthens this wait. The video runs at a fairly low frame rate (about four frames per second), which helps keep down the size of the game's data files, but also reduces the quality of the clips. Even so, the game uses more than 16 megabytes of hard disk space, and there's no way install it without the movies — even though most players will turn the clips off after a couple of games.

Designer Fritz Bronner based *Buzz Aldrin's Race Into Space* on his board game *LIFTOFF!*, and as a result *Race Into Space* is essentially a strategy





game. The game opens in the spring of 1957. As director of either the U.S. or Soviet space program, you plan activities for the upcoming season within the limits of the current budget, then sit back to see how those plans unfold. A game ends when one of the two powers lands astronauts on the moon and returns them successfully, or in the spring of 1977 — whichever comes first.



Because many of the game actions take several turns to complete, each turn must be planned carefully. For example, newly recruited astronauts attend Basic Training for three turns before they can be assigned to a spacecraft program, then spend another season training for that program's particular craft before they can be assigned to a mission. And the missions themselves must be scheduled one turn in advance of launch.

Budgetary concerns are also important. It takes money to recruit astronauts and to purchase rockets and spacecraft, and a player must pay to initiate the development program for each type of equipment before it can be flown. Hardware items carry a reliability rating that affects their chances of success when used in a mission, and the rating is very low when a program is first purchased. Reliability must be improved through several seasons of research and development, which also carries a price tag.

A nation's budget grows (or shrinks) from year to year, based on the prestige of its space program. The game includes a list of milestones in space travel — first orbital satellite, first man in space, first woman in space, first space walk, etc. — and prestige increases for the nation who first achieves these goals. Milestones don't have to be achieved in historical order, but if you skip any milestones your chances of success are drastically lowered.

Unfortunately, even the historical basis of *Race Into Space* can be called into question. A winning strategy involves developing spacecraft programs in sequential fashion, with the prestige of one successful program increasing funding, which in turn pays for new programs. This might be logical, but it doesn't square well with history. In truth, most of the hardware programs in the American moon effort were underway by the end of 1961, not long after Yuri Gagarin and Alan Shepard's first manned flights. When NASA's budget peaked in 1965, the Soviet Union had beaten the U.S. to every important milestone in the space race. Thereafter, its budget dropped each year, even as the Gemini and Apollo programs accomplished goal after goal and the Soviet space program foundered. This scenario is unimaginable in *Race Into Space*.

Of course, a computer game that simulates something as complex as the space race has to sacrifice some detail in exchange for playability, and historical nitpicking could be dismissed if the game were engaging and satisfying on its own terms. The real problem is that, despite its simplifications, *Buzz Aldrin's Race Into Space* is a very difficult game, with too little excitement to justify the effort for most players. It can only be recommended to experienced gamers with dogged persistence, lots of enthusiasm for space exploration, and an appetite for overwhelming challenges.

Interplay Productions, 17922 Fitch Avenue, Irvine, CA, 92714

THE SEVEN CITIES OF GOLD: THE COMMEMORATIVE EDITION

Category: Strategy

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Developer: Interactive Designs

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286 640K RAM Hard Drive	VGA Supported Sound Cards

MATTHEW A. FIRME

Dan Bunten's 1983 title *The Seven Cities of Gold* — which cast players as Spanish Conquistadors exploring the New World — was one of the games that hooked me on computer entertainment. My brother and I used to sit huddled over his Commodore 64, playing until the sun came up. Although the characters on the screen were little more than stick figures, we easily imagined ourselves as swaggering, greedy, almost omnipotent Conquistadors, crashing through the wilderness and taking whatever we wanted.

Now, ten years after its premier, Electronic Arts has released *The Seven Cities of Gold: The Commemorative Edition*. While the game itself is essentially the same, this revamped version adds such modern niceties as VGA graphics and sound board support — and both work well. Your on-screen character is a recognizable little Spaniard, and the jungles, deserts, rivers, and mountains he and his troops explore are colorful and evocative. You'll hear exotic birds, the roar of the ocean, and stereotypical native drums. There's background music, too, adding distinct moods to your travels.

You begin the game in Spain. After a meeting with the king and queen, you're advanced enough gold to finance a journey of exploration. Next you buy a ship and supplies, and hire enough explorers, soldiers, and clergymen to begin establishing colonies.

If you're playing a historical game, you'll know to lay in a course for northern South America, Central America, and Mexico. In a randomly generated world, you'll come closer to experiencing the uncertainty that faced the real Conquistadors. Advanced civilizations (which yield the most gold) might be anywhere on the unfamiliar new continents, and it will take a lot more patience to make your fortune.

Like the old game, this new version supports only keyboard and joystick input. This can take some getting used to, and mastering the interface is essential — careful manipulation of your on-screen character is very important. As you move your party about in the new world, they consume food rations with every step. Wasted motion can mean disaster. And you must be especially careful not to bump into native inhabitants when entering a village. Touching

the natives riles them, and too much of it may cause them to assume a hostile stance and thus lessen your chances of trading with their chief. Although you *could* go ahead and wipe out the village at this point, doing so would anger your king and make all the remaining natives very hostile indeed. Future trading would be difficult, if not impossible.

While all this is a lot of fun at first, you'll soon realize that *Seven Cities* is basically a game of bean counting. You must purchase enough food, trade goods, etc. to ensure survival and success in the New World. And while there, you must be sure to gather enough gold, artifacts, and other

valuables to finance a return voyage. Once you catch on to this fact, the framework of Spanish conquest loses a bit of its appeal: You could be a space explorer on a new planet, or a rabbit looking for fresh vegetables, and the basic mechanics of the game would be unchanged.

Ten years ago, *Seven Cities* was a revolutionary product. But it's 1993 now, and we've seen many and more complex games of both conquest and resource management. While still enjoyable (and a delightful blast from the past), *The Seven Cities of Gold: The Commemorative Edition* excels only in pointing out how far computer gaming has come in a decade.

Electronic Arts, 1450 Fashion Island Blvd., San Mateo CA 94403

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3.3 or above, Windows 3.1. Graphics compatible with VGA. Sound support: Sound Blaster, Sound

NR-13 This game is not for the faint-hearted. Contains violence and some material inappropriate for minors.

NOT RECOMMENDED FOR PLAYERS UNDER 13.

has been rated by the VRA.

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MEGATECH

Product Information Number 183

WAR IN THE GULF

Category: Combat Simulation

Publisher: Empire

Developer: Oxford Digital Enterprises

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
PC Compatible	Hard Drive
550K RAM	VGA
DOS 3.0 or higher	Supported Sound Cards
EGA	Mouse

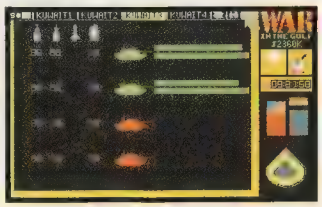
Empire's *Pacific Islands* was a decent game sabotaged by a silly premise: Renegade Soviet and North Korean communists had seized the Pacific atoll of Yama Yama, prompting the United States to launch a retaliatory invasion.

JEFF SEIKEN

With *War in the Gulf*, Empire has come up with a much more compelling hook: Four years after the Gulf War, Iraq has again seized the oil fields in northern Kuwait, embroiling the region in yet another conflict. You're in command of a tank company at the spear-tip of the U.S. counterattack.

War in the Gulf (*WG*) actually represents the fourth incarnation of Empire's tactical combat engine, which made its debut in *Team Yankee* and then continued with *Pacific Islands* and *Campaign*. Oddly enough, *WG*'s pedigree isn't mentioned anywhere on the box or in the documentation, leading one to wonder if Empire is trying to distance this game from its predecessors. Make no mistake about it, though: *WG* is a virtual carbon of *Pacific Islands*, from the rule book right down to the four types of enemy tanks you'll encounter. The only clear-cut difference lies in the contents of the scenarios.

The interface utilizes a clever but cluttered design, splitting the screen into four quadrants — one for each tank platoon in your charge. This arrangement is intended to allow you to keep tabs on all four platoons simultaneously. You can also switch to a full-screen view of any single platoon. This often becomes necessary once the shooting starts, as you'll need the extra detail you get with the larger, 3-D graphics window.



The interface works smoothly enough once you memorize the meaning of the different command icons, but there's a big sticking point to the whole scheme. Although your outfit contains 16 individual vehicles crewed by something like 60 soldiers, combat is basically a one-man operation. The only way a platoon will engage the enemy is if you aim and fire its guns manually. And while you're busy plugging away with one platoon, the other three will simply twiddle their turrets, regardless of how many juicy targets might be sitting in their gunsights.

The absence of any sort of auto-gunner option would seem to be a deliberate design decision. But if it's intended to make the game more challenging, it does so in an artificial manner that nullifies whatever claim *WG* might have made to being a serious simulation. Tactics in the game almost run counter to common sense, as the cardinal rule of combat in *WG* boils down to this: At all costs, avoid exposing more than one platoon to enemy fire at the same time. Forget maneuvering your units so they can support each other in a firefight. If any of your platoons other than the one you're controlling is placed in harm's way, it's just so much cannon fodder.

The best part of the package remains the scenarios. There are 25 in all, and each is crafted to pose a very different and often unique tactical problem. For instance, one of your first missions calls for you to expel the Iraqis from their positions around an archaeological site — without damaging any of the priceless buildings or statues. Winning is tough even in the earliest battles, as you are typically outnumbered and forced to follow a tight timetable. But that's what makes the scenarios so absorbing. They're constructed such that winning requires forethought as much as, if not more than, a fast trigger finger.

Like *Pacific Islands* before it, *War in the Gulf* occupies that murky territory between game and simulation. It winds up being far closer to the former than the latter, despite some extravagant claims on the back of the box ("The Ultimate Battlefield Simulation?" That's stretching it a bit!). But the intelligent design of the scenarios really redeems the game, and keeps its formula fresh and entertaining. Combative types who can tolerate the program's obvious limitations as a simulation might find *War in the Gulf* to be just the fight they've been seeking.

Empire Simulations, The Spires, 677 High Road, North Finchley, London N12 0DA. United Kingdom

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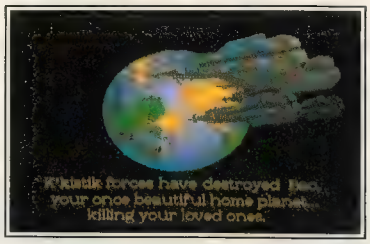

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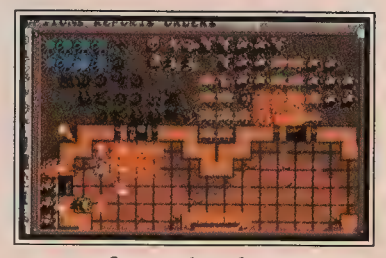

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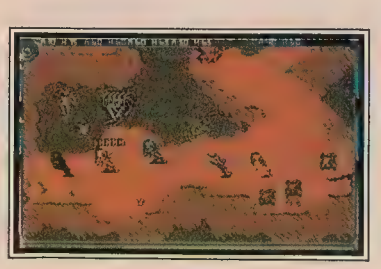

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Product Information Number 230

PIRATES! GOLD

Category: Role-playing Adventure

Publisher: MicroProse

Developer: MicroProse

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386/16, Hard Drive	SVGA
4MB RAM	Supported Sound Cards
DOS 3.3 or higher	
VGA	
Mouse, Keyboard	

Back when I was a kid, two of the most popular books in the school library were *Treasure Island* (illustrated by the great N.C. Wyeth) and *The Book of Pirates*, written and illustrated by Howard Pyle. Aside from the swashbuckling stories, what drew us to those books were the fabulous illustrations — rich, textured works that seemed to glow from within — of mustachioed buccaneers laying-about with murderous cutlasses; sun-drenched, paradisiacal treasure islands; Spanish galleons in flames!

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

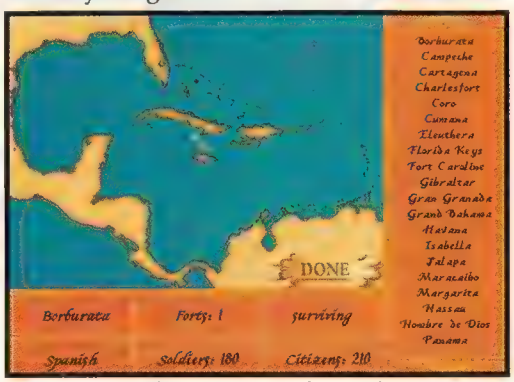
So it was an unexpected pleasure, as well as a lurching moment of deja vu, when I loaded *Pirates! Gold* for the first time and beheld that same visual style used lavishly, lovingly, and brilliantly throughout this updated version of the PC classic *Pirates!* This is one of the most beautiful games I've seen in a long, long time.

Pirates! Gold is special because it actualizes a powerful and timeless fantasy — that of being a lone, destiny-touched hero seeking fame, fortune, and glory in a violent, two-fisted historical milieu. If this isn't the way the life of seventeenth-century pirates really was, it's certainly how it ought to have been!

You begin each game as a promising young sea dog, in command of a small ship and ragtag crew who is loyal to you only as long as you keep them well supplied with doubloons. You may engage in quasi-legal activities as a privateer, or outright plunder under the skull-and-crossbones. As your fame, skill, and fortune increase, you'll commandeer bigger and more powerful ships — perhaps even your own private navy.

Capturing ships is only one way to get ahead in this colorful, risky world. You may be sent on dangerous secret missions, discover a map to buried treasure, or attempt the daring rescue of a beautiful maiden. If you're really good, you might plunder the entire Spanish treasure fleet as it sails from the New World to the old.

You can play in any of six historical eras, each with its own special flavor, or you can relive famous expeditions by such fearsome characters as Henry Morgan or Sir Francis Drake. The career



games cover about ten years' time (you want to retire while you're still young enough to enjoy your riches, don't you?), and the "famous expedition" scenarios make for terrific short games.

All the ingredients that made the original *Pirates!* such a hit have been retained, and wisely so. But there are some slick improvements. The fencing system, for instance, is now mouse-driven, and provides a surprisingly realistic simulation of actual fencing thrusts and parries.

Ship-to-ship duels and land combat are now much more detailed and realistic. You'll hear your cannon balls slash the water or splinter an enemy's mast, and you can conduct vividly detailed sieges and bombardments. This is a war game, a fantasy game, a quest game, and an RPG, all rolled into one lovely package.

The soundtrack is nearly as marvelous as the graphics, with ringing steel, booming cannon, and delightful music — sea chanties when you visit the tavern, Bach and Handel when you're calling on the colonial governors.

Pirates! Gold seems to be almost infinitely replayable. Depending on the era you choose, the level of difficulty, and what actions you take in the course of the game, the mix of incidents is always unpredictable. Just when you think you've got it all figured out, the game throws you a surprise — usually a very dangerous one.

Pirates! Gold is a sequel which royally replaces the original, but which retains and refines all the great features that made its forebear so popular. *Pirates! Gold* is seductively beautiful, easy to learn, and sure to provide months of great gaming. Bravo, MicroProse!

Microprose, 180 Lakefront Drive, Hunt Valley, MD 21030

LOST SECRET OF THE RAINFOREST

Category: Education

Publisher: Sierra

Developer: Sierra

Rating:

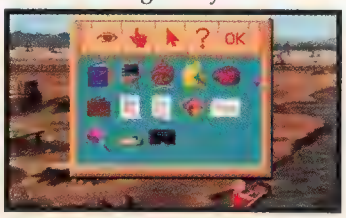
REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286/16, Hard Drive	386SX/16
570K RAM	2 MB RAM
DOS 3.3 or higher	DOS 5.0
VGA/EGA/Tandy VGA	Supported Sound Cards

LESLIE EISER

As young Adam Greene, savior of the Coral Reefs in last year's *Ecoquest: The Search for Cetus*, you're constantly looking for new challenges, new places to explore, new worlds to discover — and you're about to get your wish. In *Lost Secret of the Rainforest*, your father, renowned ecologist Dr. Greene, is trying to introduce sustainable agriculture to the native inhabitants of a Peruvian rainforest, and you've been invited along.

What you find, though, is a land in turmoil. The slash-and-burn tactics of a high-handed developer named Mr. Slaughter threaten the natives and their home. Soon you're in a canoe headed upstream, into the heart of the forest. You must save not only the native population, but also the rainforest itself.

Climbing high into the forest canopy, you see the full extent of the damage. Slaughter has been destroying parts of the forest, killing animals for sport, terrorizing the peaceful natives, and basically being obnoxious. Ultimately, you must return to the natives what is rightfully theirs — a belief in their ability to find solutions to the problems that threaten their existence.



In order to do this (and successfully finish the game), you must solve a series of interconnected puzzles using the Sierra Standard Menu Interface. Icons are available for all necessary actions: feet for walking, a hand to pick things up, an eye to examine objects closely, and even a recycling icon to clean up the trash you find lying around. Use the mouth icon to talk to any of the inhabitants of the forest, from the human villagers to the animals and plants whose lives are most threatened by Slaughter's unthinking development of the rainforest.

As in all new educational adventures from Sierra, *Lost Secret of the Rainforest* features multiple environments to explore, as well as attractive graphics, occasional bits of spoken dialogue, and decent sound effects. There are also healthy servings of scientific and cultural information, which you'll collect with a device called the Ecorder. This hand-held computer contains an extensive database of rainforest facts and Pre-Incan lore, but to retrieve data on an entry you must first locate it within the adventure. This keeps you honest -- you need the information to complete certain parts of the adventure, and you can only get the information by Ecording everything you see.

Other games in the Sierra Discovery Series base solutions to puzzles on real science, with the goal of reinforcing learning through practical application. If you need to use the water in a pitcher plant to put out a fire, for example, perhaps you'll remember that pitcher plants act as water reservoirs for insects in the rainforest. Unfortunately, few of the puzzles in *The Lost Secret of the Rainforest* require this kind of thinking. Too often, the puzzles are more like what you'd find in a standard graphic adventure — pick up a tennis racket from a chest in one scene and use it as a paddle in another — or trial-and-error affairs, such as pulling on the tail of a stuffed tiger to get the combination to a safe. Even freeing caged birds doesn't require a scientific solution. You just have to use the key from the safe at the right moment.

There's nothing wrong with these challenges from a gaming point of view; the problem is, they have little to do with the rainforest ecosystem. And some of the puzzles that *are* clearly related to the rainforest aren't exactly complimentary to the inhabitants. Giving a love charm to a quarreling couple is cute, but do we really want to teach youngsters that the descendants of the Incas are superstitious and easily fooled? Also disappointing are the oft-missed opportunities to reinforce an important point. The weaving skills of the older generations are mentioned, but the puzzle that involves the weaver deals with love charms, not knowledge and craftsmanship. Similarly, hunters are seen, but they serve only as a source of tools for a frustrated gardener, not as a way to introduce the problems of sustainable hunting in the rainforest.

These objections aside, *The Lost Secret of the Rainforest* is an intriguing adventure game for the younger set. The puzzles are relatively easy, there's a lot to read, it's impossible to be killed, and justice is served at the end. If an adventure with a dash of environmental activism sounds interesting, you're going to love this game. It delivers on its promise to combine education and entertainment — with an emphasis on entertainment.

Sierra, P.O. Box 485, Coarsegold CA 93614

SYNDICATE

Category: Strategy/Simulation

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Developer: Bullfrog

Rating:

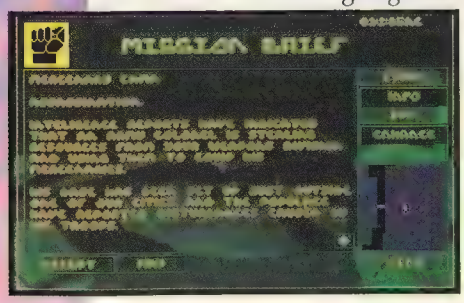
REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386/16, Hard Drive	386/33
4MB RAM	DOS 5.0 Or Higher Or
DOS 3.3 Or Higher	Memory Manager
VGA	Sound Blaster Or 100%
Mouse	Compatible Sound Card

The future's bleak — if *Syndicate* is any indication, that is. But it can also be a lot of fun, *if* you're ruthless enough to survive in this violent game of espionage and urban combat.

LEE BUCHANAN

In a world controlled by giant multinational corporations, rival crime syndicates battle in the city streets to conquer territories and amass fortunes through taxes. That's accomplished with mechanically enhanced cyborgs, heavily armed killing machines that enter a city to carry out your orders. As an ambitious executive with a small European syndicate, you're assigned eight cyborgs and a limited budget. From there, you're on your own.

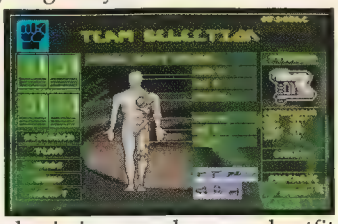
The cities are the centerpiece of *Syndicate*, and they're exquisitely rendered and remarkably detailed. While your agents are going about their bloody business, the city's innocent civilians are going about theirs: The streets come alive as traffic moves about and people board commuter trains and cars. But these futuristic cities all have a dark and foreboding feel, making them the perfect battleground for these superhuman cyborgs.



The action that takes place on *Syndicate*'s mean streets is nothing short of sensational. Explosions, laser blasts, automatic-weapons fire, and the other results of this deadly trade will delight any bloodthirsty computer gamer. But don't spend too much time as a spectator, because the action demands snap decisions and quick action if your team of cyborgs is to survive.

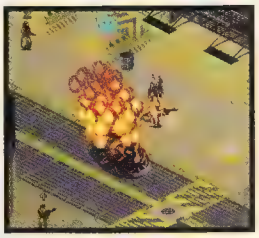
The graphics and the action are marvelous, but beneath that gorgeous exterior lies a very complex strategy game. You're concerned with more than fighting in the streets: To win the game, you must develop strategic and tactical plans, maintain a budget, properly equip the agents and, naturally, have a "remorseless lust for power to commit acts of gross violence but sleep soundly at night."

The object of *Syndicate* is simple: Take over the world. Beginning from your home territory, you must conquer adjacent territories by infiltrating cities controlled by rival syndicates and achieving specific mission goals. Once you control a territory, you can raise taxes to reap the funds necessary to build a cyborg army.



At the start of the game, you're given a budget from which you must buy all equipment and make modifications to the agents. For each mission, you choose and outfit a team from the eight agents at your disposal. Since the budget represents a running total for the game, don't waste money on extra agents and expensive equipment on easy missions — you'll need all the cash you can get for the more difficult assignments.

Agents come equipped with pistols; shotguns, scanners, medical kits, and Persuadertrons (a neat device that can turn enemies into allies) are also available. Allocate some of your budget to research, and you'll develop more powerful weapons, including machine guns, rockets, lasers, and flame throwers.



Your cyborgs can be modified with a variety of physical and mental enhancements — mechanical limbs, better vision, bigger hearts, and higher intelligence. These modifications, while costly, are critical to carrying out the more difficult missions.

The agents' movement is controlled with a mouse — simply click on his destination or in the direction you wish him to move (any combination of agents may also be controlled as a group). Arming, targeting, and firing weapons are also easily accomplished with mouse clicks.

Syndicate is one of those rare games that combines spectacular graphics, hair-raising action, and complex strategies. It's violent and bloody, but *Syndicate* delivers some unique, challenging, and highly entertaining computer entertainment. This one is highly recommended.

Electronic Arts, 1450 Fashion Island Blvd., San Mateo CA 94404-2064

AMBUSH AT SORINOR

Category: Fantasy War Game

Publisher: Mindcraft

Developer: Mindcraft

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286/12, Hard Drive	386SX/20
640K RAM	3 MB RAM
VGA	DOS 5.0 or higher
	Supported Sound Card

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

This game is essentially *Siege* without walls: same style of graphics, same top-down perspective, same cast of monsters and humanoids, and practically the same interface.

Ambush at Sorinor lets you assume the role of a mercenary commander who hires his services to any of the six clans inhabiting the land of Sorinor. You can choose to play single missions — a generous total of 237 scenarios is provided — or campaign games which link varied missions together. More than 100 types of soldiery are available (although not, of course, in the same scenario), and if that isn't enough for you, you can generate your own maps and battles using the customizing program (for which Mindscape has thoughtfully provided a tutorial). There's certainly a lot of replay value here!

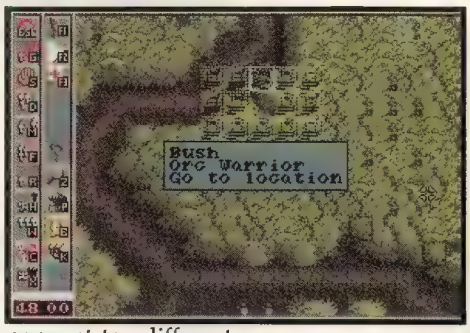
All the scenarios are variations on two basic themes: You are either the ambushee, in which case you must avoid or fight your way clear of enemy traps; or the ambusher, assigned the task of bushwhacking an enemy party and killing a specified number of V.I.P. characters.

You can plant traps, conceal troops under cover and then unleash them, divide or converge units, conduct ranged fire with archers, or engage in melee combat with hack-and-slash warriors of many different kinds. The battles are fun to watch, and come complete with severed heads, lopped-off limbs, and plenty of blood-curdling screams in the soundtrack.

The successful completion of one job brings not only monetary profit and a new contract, but also increased prestige with whichever tribe hired you. Fail, and you'll incur the ill-will of your employers, which *will* have an impact on future missions.

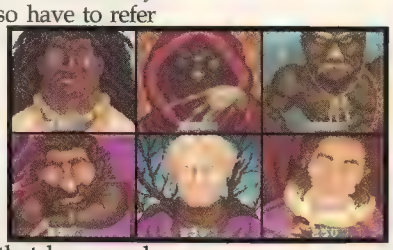
As with *Siege*, there are three viewing modes available during battle: Strategic, Area, and Local. Only in Local view do you get to see the combatants as individual figures (in the other modes, they are only abstract dots), and this is the view you'll probably use the most as it's the most visually interesting.

But unfortunately, you can't coordinate overall strategies while in Local mode, and so you must quickly toggle views during the course of the game. This was a problem in the initial shipments of *Ambush* because battles tended to develop very quickly, reaching a crisis within two or three minutes. In order to exercise even minimal control of your troops, you had to use the Pause function almost constantly — the pace of game play just wasn't properly correlated to the speed at which you could change viewing modes.



Fortunately, a bug patch was released just at press time which gives you the option of running the game at ten different speeds (new shipments of the game incorporate this fix). Choosing a less frantic pace results in a significant improvement in game play. Now you have time to exercise real tactical control over your troops, as well as to savor the handsome graphics and the bloodthirsty details of the battle scenes.

But there's still a problem with the top-down point of view. On the open landscapes of *Ambush*, the tops of one army's heads look pretty much like those of another's. This wasn't as much of a hindrance in *Siege* — the castle walls gave you a quick frame of reference as to which units were friend and which foe. But in the melee combat so frequently encountered in *Ambush*, this can cause confusion and frustration; in addition to constantly changing scale and view, you also have to refer constantly to the "?" icon to find out who you're looking at.



I ran into another sticking point while playing the game on my 386/40 with 2 MB of RAM. When more than about 20 figures were onscreen at once, the animation occasionally became choppy and dreadfully slow, and when that happened, mouse control was temporarily lost. On a 486/50 with 8 MB of RAM, however, I have yet to see the same glitch.

I enjoyed *Ambush at Sorinor* for the first 20 or so encounters, but after that the missions began to acquire a certain sameness. Of course, players interested in fantasy-based combat who have the luxury of playing it when they want and for as long as they want will probably enjoy it more. In any event, *Ambush at Sorinor* is a clever, challenging, and attractive extension of the *Siege* system.

Mindcraft, 2291 205th St., Suite 201, Torrance, CA 90501

AIR DUEL: 80 YEARS OF DOGFIGHTING

Category: Air Combat Simulation

Publisher: MicroProse

Developer: Microprose

Rating:

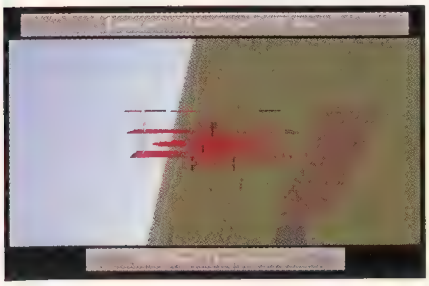
REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286/16, Hard Drive	386DX/25 or better
1 MB RAM	2MB RAM
DOS 5.0	Supported Sound Cards
VGA/MCGA	Joystick, Mouse

SCOTT WOLF

Computer flight simulations, like man's first real flights, were born of a desire to break free of Earth's bonds and soar like birds. Before long, though, even the euphoria of free flight waned — and that's when *The Need* arose. Not a Need for speed, but The Need to fly circles around the other birds, and knock them screaming and bleeding from the sky. Dogfighting, we humans call it (what dogs call it remains a mystery), and for most gamers, a flight simulation lives or dies by the quality of its dogfighting sequences.

MicroProse is calling *Air Duel* an entry-level flight sim because it exists purely for aerial combat, and not to represent a complex historical or theoretical campaign. The designers have taken 12 legendary aircraft, 6 wartime scenarios, 7 combat zones, and basically said, "OK, now go nuts!"

The *Air Duel* Dozen are: the Sopwith Camel, Fokker DR1, MkII Spitfire, Messerschmitt Bf109E, F-86E Sabre, MiG-15, F-4J Phantom, MiG-21F, Sea Harrier FRS.1, Mirage IIIE, F-16A Fighting Falcon, and MiG-23S. The external views of these birds are terrific, with texture-mapped camouflage and national insignia — there's even the black-tailed Jolly Roger of the VF-84's Phantoms. Each plane's cockpit is realistically rendered, and every pilot has a different face and helmet.



In fact, *everything* looks great until you're airborne. In the sky, you'll see a glaring sun and graduated horizon, but no clouds. And the landscape below is flat and uninteresting. *Air Duel* has less ground detail than Electronic Arts' *Chuck Yeager's Air Combat*, yet runs about half as fast — even on a 486DX/33. Only by turning down the already minimal detail can you achieve an acceptable frame rate. But while these flaws might have doomed a less interesting game, *Air Duel* is addictive enough to overcome them.

There are three modes of play: "Duel," "Missions," and "What If?" The same six battle scenarios — World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Falklands, and Syria — are available in each mode.

In Duel mode, you select an era and go up against one of its two premier aircraft. After picking a starting position (Random, Head to Head, Bounce from Above, etc.), you're ready for action. Missions mode offers a streamlined campaign in each era, and allows you to assign tasks to resource aircraft at your command; these include Hurricanes, Ju88s, F-84s, A-7s, B-29s, Kfir-C2s, and F-15Es. You can fight for either side, with the added bonus of dogfighting the enemy's support planes (which aren't available in Duel or What If?). The ability to select targets by toggling through them in map or tactical views is another nice feature of this combat mode.

My favorite mode by far is "What If?" You can fly any plane against any combination of others (up to five at a time), in any of the seven combat zones. Take on three DR1s in an F-16 over Vietnam, or play David in a Spitfire against Goliath's missile-laden Phantom over Israel. The computer-controlled pilots are better than you might expect, and will do whatever they can to knock your nose in the dirt.

But it's in the head-to-head mode against a friend, linked directly or via modem, that *Air Duel* really shines. A chat mode allows you to coordinate planes and regions if you like, but surprising each other is more fun — especially if you can resist the temptation to check out your opponent with a reverse-tactical view. Hit him right and he'll trail a ribbon of greasy black smoke, making him easier to track and flame.

Air Duel is classic MicroProse. From the opening animation and game configurations to the engagement setups and "aftermath" screens, the artwork is top-notch. Despite the slow frame rate, *Air Duel* is definitely fun to play. With a little more effort, however, this could have been the game that replaced *Yeager* on a lot of hard drives.

MicroProse, 180 Lakefront Drive, Hunt Valley MD 21030-2245

RETURN OF THE PHANTOM

Category: Graphic Adventure

Publisher: MicroProse

Developer: MicroProse

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286	386 Or Better
2 MB RAM	Supported Sound Cards
Hard Drive	Mouse
VGA/MCGA Graphics	

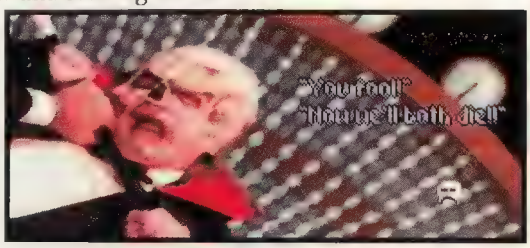
T. LIAM MCDONALD

There's something about the story of Erik, the hideous Phantom of the Opera, that continues to fascinate us even 80 years after its publication. The romantic thriller has generated countless film, television, and stage incarnations, from Lon Chaney's silent film classic to Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical hit. Now MicroProse brings the story of the Phantom of the Opera to your PC.

MicroProse's *Return of the Phantom* is a fairly faithful retelling of the sad tale about a brilliant but deformed genius who dwells beneath the Paris Opera House. The major change is that the story begins in the present. The Phantom is back, and he still has a thing for pretty young ingenues. When a producer fails to heed the Phantom's warnings and casts his protege, Christine Florent, in a lead role, the Phantom gets his revenge by dropping a massive chandelier on the production's unsuspecting audience. Enter Raoul Montand, a French detective asked to investigate the disaster and determine if the "Opera Ghost" of legend has returned.

Things quickly go from bad to worse for the young detective. He discovers that Christine Florent has been strangled, and then the Phantom pushes him from a catwalk. When he awakes, Christine is by his side. But somehow, both are now in the past: Christine Florent is Christine Daae, and Raoul Montand is Raoul de Chagny. It soon becomes clear to Raoul that he must put an end to the Phantom in the past if he's to prevent Christine Florent's murder in the present.

You play as Raoul, wandering the halls, stage, lofts, catacombs, and other locations above and below the Opera House. The entire theatrical setting is captured nicely, and the intricacies of the Opera House provide a good deal of atmosphere. While the graphics could have been better, on the whole the use of color and shading is effective.

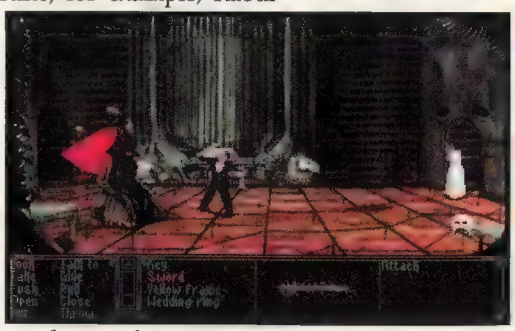


There isn't a lot of action until the very end of the game, so calling this an "adventure" is almost a stretch. As you guide Raoul about the Opera House (both in the past and present), you're really just investigating crimes the Opera Ghost has committed. A dialogue tree guides you rigidly through all encounters, diffusing any sense that you're really solving the crimes. Only a few scattered objects can be picked up and put in your inventory, and these vanish when Raoul leaps back in time, before you've even used them. Then the objects must be collected *again*—although you don't actively use them in the past, either!

Very quickly, the game becomes mired in a pattern of entering rooms, picking up (but not using) objects, entering other rooms, and talking to people. When the right person is interviewed *and* the right object is in your possession, the story continues; if you don't have the necessary object, the narrative stops until you find it. Then the story bounces right along, with some good writing and interesting twists, but very little sense of *interaction*.

There are almost no true puzzles, and the few that do exist are painfully easy. *Return of the Phantom* lets you choose between two levels of difficulty, Novice and Challenging. I played on Challenging, and can't imagine what Novice entails. Does it remove the few challenges you've struggled so hard to find?

Probably most disappointing is that so many opportunities to include puzzles were missed. In order to rescue Christine, for example, Raoul must traverse the Phantom's secret Puzzle Room. In both the novel and the game, the Phantom is supposed to be an aficionado of puzzles and deception. So what brain-teasing test does the Phantom use to secure Christine? A childish numbers and letters game, and a revolving portrait puzzle. I solved both on the first try.



There's a lot in *Return of the Phantom* that's very well done: the writing is exceptionally good, the interface is easy to use, and the entire setting is ripe with potential. Unfortunately, there's very little challenge to tie it all together, and even beginning gamers will find that *Return of the Phantom* is long on promise, but short on substance.

MicroProse, 180 Lakefront Drive, Hunt Valley MD 21030

RAGS TO RICHES

Category: Financial Simulation

Publisher: Interplay

Developer: Interplay

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286/10, Hard Drive	SVGA
640K RAM	Supported Sound Card
DOS 3.1 or higher	Mouse
VGA	

PHILL POWELL

Wall Street's wheelers and dealers are a controversial breed — admired by some, hated by others. And perhaps because their hustling, bustling world is so foreign to most of us, the New York Stockbroker has become a classic American stereotype, like the Cowboy or the Irish Cop. We imagine the financial predator in his element, phone glued to his ear, shouting "Sell, SELL!" while chomping a cigar and tugging at his shirt collar.

Interplay's *Rags to Riches* capitalizes on the Wall Street stereotype, and distills it into rich humor. The game is full of satirical touches: Your brokerage is launched with graduation gift money and can be kept afloat with maternal loans; charity donations are suggested to disguise your shadier dealings; and you're rewarded for conspicuously spending your earnings.

But lampooning aside, *Rags to Riches* functions capably as a financial simulation. You might even learn a thing or two as you play.

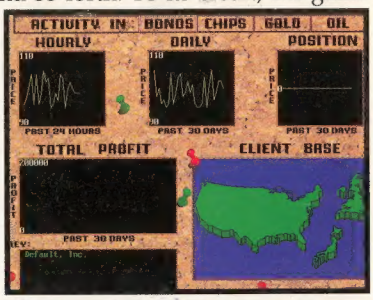
Rags to Riches mimics the actual chronology of the Wall Street week, and consequently you'll come to appreciate the importance of time. The market opens and closes when it should, with overseas exchanges operating on the appropriate schedules. Even the human sleep cycle must be observed: Work yourself around the clock, and eventually you'll blow a fuse.

Timing is crucial in another respect. Market trends kick in suddenly, with stocks and commodities beefing up and slimming down in the wink of an eye. If your portfolio includes several of the four available investments (blue chip stocks, oil, bonds, and gold), you'll find yourself clicking rapidly between the growth charts of each investment, studying every hiccup on the graphs.

But solid information is the real key to wealth. Most market shifts are predictable, especially if you know what signals to look for. The game even drops a few hints you'd have to be legally dead to miss (an upward-pointing arrow beside an oil barrel, for example). Other clues aren't nearly as obvious, and a bit of deduction may be necessary to uncover the tip contained in the information.

Gathering information, then, is a vital component of success. That means watching the news updates reported on your stock ticker, as well as scanning the morning newspaper as soon as it hits the stoop. You can even phone for anonymous stock tips — but beware of the ever-vigilant Securities and Exchange Commission!

You'll perform some nuts-and-bolts administration, too. Part of your effort to rack up a fortune involves running an office — hiring staff, attracting clients, and so forth. To its credit, the game integrates this dimension of the stockbroker's world without belaboring the point.



With so many chores to manage, it's a good thing the game's interface is efficient. You can access that day's news quickly and easily, and whisk it away just as fast. A solid interface isn't solely a matter of convenience, either. Remember, this is business. In this game, a clunky interface could cost you millions of dollars, as well as your competitive edge. It would be nice if you could access all four investment graphs on one screen, but that's pretty small potatoes.

Aside from its other strengths, *Rags to Riches* deserves praise for its very good documentation. The well-written manual gives an interesting overview of American economics, a subject that could easily have become an uninteresting jumble of graphs and numbers.

Equally commendable is the choice of playing in either of two historical periods. You can play in the present day, or begin your career in January of 1929 — a mere ten months before the stock market crash. The differences between the two periods are striking: Not only does the market of yesteryear keep irregular hours due to sporadic trading, but the only available stocks are the traditional American blue chips (AT&T, GE, RCA, and U.S. Steel). You'll also notice that information, the lifeblood of investment, is a lot harder to come by in 1929. Newspaper reporting, for instance, is fairly terse, and doesn't analyze trends like today's papers. Regardless of which era you choose, you'll have a fine time making or breaking your fortune in *Rags to Riches*. This is a clever simulation, with plenty of good humor to recommend it. It's also a very *large* game, and greedily demands 15 MB of hard-disk space.

Isn't that just like a game about Wall Street?

Interplay Productions, 17922 Fitch Avenue, Irvine, CA 92714

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Sprint long-distance service just became more valuable - up to $159.95 more! Now, when you switch your home long-distance service to Sprint, you can select any Sierra game, free! And after enjoying six months of high-quality long-distance, you'll receive a second Sierra game or one month of free long-distance service.*

Only Sprint can offer you a nationwide 100% digital, fiber optic network that provides the long-distance quality and reliability you need. Experience for yourself Sprint's "fiber optic" clarity that makes both your long-distance calls and PC data transmissions crystal clear and error free.

But unsurpassed call and data clarity is just one of the many benefits you will enjoy as a Sprint customer...

"The Most℠" A Unique Calling Plan

Sprint offers an unprecedented long-distance calling plan called "The Most℠" available now for all customers. The Most will save Sprint customers 20 percent on already low rates on their calls each month to whomever they talk to the most, including international calls–even if the called person is with a competitive long-distance carrier.

The Most will also provide automatic 20 percent discounts on all calls to Sprint's millions of customers, anytime and anywhere.

When the most frequently called number in a given month is a Sprint customer, Sprint will combine both discounts for an effective overall savings of 36 percent on calls to that number.**

Save on Long Distance When You're away from home too!

Sprint's FONCARD℠ travel card lets you continue to take advantage of clear calling and savings even when you're away from home. Plus the FONCARD is free, with cards available to every member of your family.

The Service You Deserve

At Sprint, we make no compromises when it comes to dependable, personal service - we do it all; operator services, directory assistance, customer service, even instant credit for wrong numbers. And we do it 24 hours a day!

No Risk Guarantee

Your satisfaction is guaranteed: we'll pick up the cost of switching your long distance to Sprint, and will even pay to switch you back if you are not completely satisfied. (Some restrictions apply.)

So why not sign up for Sprint and receive the clarity, savings and service you want while getting two Sierra games you enjoy?

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* Offer valid only in the U.S. and for new Sprint customers. Not valid for FONCARD - only orders. Certain restrictions apply. Free month is up to $25 usage on 4th month invoice. To qualify for a second game or free month of long-distance the customer must bill $20 per month in 3 of the first 6 months.
** THE MOST discounts apply to intra-state calls only where authorized.

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